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PROPHECY IN MARI, NEO-ASSYRIAN, AND
HEBREW SOURCES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY.

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PHD
THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
2015

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Abstract.

It is widely acknowledged that the phenomenon of prophecy was not restricted only to ancient Israel, but is well attested throughout the ancient Near East, not least but in the textual material retrieved from the Mesopotamian capitals of Mari and Nineveh. A number of recent studies have utilized these sources to discuss the literary history and rhetorical content of Hebrew prophecy. The following thesis differs from these by undertaking to examine and compare the institution of prophecy as it occurs in the Mari, Neo-Assyrian, and Hebrew sources.

“Prophecy” is considered to be a mode of non-inductive divination, separate from dreams, that, ideally, is denoted by the active intermediation of allegedly divine messages to a human audience. Thus, texts that record the direct speech of a deity and are communicated to an audience by a human intermediary—without recourse to dreams or technical divination—may potentially reflect prophecy in the Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources. Along with a selection of preexilic Hebrew oracular sources, the image of prophecy in all three corpora is independently examined along seven lines: Prompting Prophecy, Prophets, Prophetic Deities, Venues, Means of Delivery, Content of Oracles, and the Responses to Prophecy. Observations gleaned from this analysis are then compared and contrasted with one another to derive a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of prophecy in each source.

Among other conclusions, it is observed that it is insufficient to simply silhouette Hebrew prophecy against its Mesopotamian counterparts, as if the images of prophecy in Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources themselves represent indistinguishable phenomena. Indeed, despite considerable overlap, they are not completely consistent. This result, it is argued, places in context some of the more glaring discrepancies between these sources and the image of prophecy in the Hebrew sources.

Signed Declaration.

I hereby affirm that I have composed this thesis and that the work is my own.
The work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Jason S. Atkinson

Date

Acknowledgements.

This thesis has been completed because of the guidance, encouragement, and support of so many learned scholars as well as loving friends and family. The primary supervision of Dr. David Reimer has been enormously helpful and encouraging. Dr. Reimer has thoughtfully commented on all of my chapters and was always responsive in my requests to meet. I am also grateful to Prof. Hans Barstad, my second supervisor, for his early assistance.

The teaching and mentoring of Prof. K. Lawson Younger opened my mind to the ancient context of scripture and the importance of comprehending the message of the Hebrew Bible in its original literary environment. Prof. Richard E. Averbeck complemented this in his approach to the Pentateuch and always found time to personally meet with us, frequently opening his home to students.

Between 2009–11, my tuition was supported by a University of Edinburgh School of Divinity Scholarship and a University of Edinburgh Overseas Research Scholarship. I wish to also acknowledge the generosity of the Langham Partnership and ScholarLeaders International to our family during our time in the United Kingdom. Their combined generosity have enabled my wife and myself to complete our theses. We are most grateful for their assistance, not least but during turbulent economic times internationally.

The close friendship of Dr. John and Mrs. Irene Hannah has meant that in Edinburgh we have never lacked close family. Their encouragement as well as prayerful and practical support—not least childcare—has kept us going through this sojourn. Likewise, I wish also to acknowledge the pastoral care we have frequently received from our church family at Chalmer’s Church, Edinburgh. Many others have also assisted us in countless ways and we are truly blessed and grateful for their friendship and support.

My wife Rebecca as well as our sons Kereb and Nahum have all shared in the highs and lows encountered in the writing of this thesis. Kereb daily—and vigorously—cheers me off to work and enthusiastically welcomes me home. Rebecca has been my greatest champion and it is to her, my closest friend, that I wish to dedicate this thesis.

Abbreviations.

A.	Louvre Museum siglum
AB	The Anchor Bible
ABAW NF	Abhandlungen der Bayrischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Neue Folge
AbB	Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ABL	R. F. Harper, <i>Assyrian Babylonian Letters</i> . London and Chicago 1892–1914
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ADOG	Abhandlungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AfOB	Archiv für Orientforschung Beiheft
AGA	J. Huehnergard. <i>A Grammar of Akkadian</i> . 2nd ed. HSS 45. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005.
AHw	<i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> . W. von Soden. 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. 1959–1981.
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
ANES	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
ANETS	Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies
AO.	Tablets in the collections of the Louvre Museum
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AoF	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
APHAO	Association pour la promotion de l'Histoire et de l'Archaeologie Orientales
ARM	Archives royales de Mari
ARMT	Archives royales de Mari, transcrite et traduite
ASJ	<i>Acta Sumerologica</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BaghMB	Baghdader Mitteilungen Beiheft
BCSMS	<i>Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BLMJ	Museum siglum of the Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem
BM ³	B. Foster, <i>Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature</i> . 3rd ed.

	Bethesda: CDL Press, 2005.
Bu	Tablets in the collections of the British Museum
BWL	W.G. Lambert, <i>Babylonian Wisdom Literature</i> . London: Oxford University Press, 1960.
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago</i> . 21 vols. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2010.
CB	Field numbers of tablets excavated at Chagar Bazar
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by W.W. Hallo and K.L. Younger. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002.
CRRAI	Compte rendu de la Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale
CSMSJ	<i>Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies Journal</i>
CT	Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum
CurBS	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
DCH	<i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . Edited by D. Clines. 8 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2011.
DDD	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> . Edited by K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst. Leiden: Brill, 1995.
DMOA	Documenta et monumenta Orientis antiqui
DOTP	<i>Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets</i> . Edited by M. J. Boda and J.G. McConville. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012.
EI	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FLP	Tablets in the collections of the Free Library of Philadelphia
FM	Florilegium Marianum
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GAG ³	W. von Soden. <i>Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik</i> . 3rd ed. Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995.
HALOT	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999.
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HR	<i>History of Religions</i>

HSMS	Harvard Semitic Museum Studies
HSS	Harvard Semitic Series
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IBHS	B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. <i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
IM	Iraq Museum siglum
<i>Iraq</i>	<i>Iraq</i>
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society (of Columbia University)</i>
JARG	<i>Jahrbuch für Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
J-M	Paul Joüon. <i>Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> . Translated and revised by T. Muraoka. <i>Subsidia Biblica</i> 27. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto biblico, 2006.
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
K.	Tablets in the Kouyunjik collection of the British Museum
KAI	H. Donner and W. Röllig. <i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . Vol. 1. 5th ed. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002.
KTT	Field numbers of tablets excavated at Tuttul
LAPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient
LTBA	Di Lexikalischen Tafelserin der Babylonier und Assyrier in dem Berliner Museen
M.	Tablet siglum of texts from Mari
MARI	<i>Mari, Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires</i>
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations
MDP	Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse

MDAI	Mémoires de la Délégation Archéologique en Iran
MSL	Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon
NABU	<i>Nouvelles assyriologiques breves et utilitaires</i>
NAC	New American Commentary
ND	Field numbers of tablets excavated at Nimrud
NEAEHL	<i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> . Edited by E. Stern. 5 vols. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993–2008.
NedTT	<i>Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift</i>
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OAC	Orientis Antiqui Collectio
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OEANE	<i>The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East</i> . Edited by E. Meyers. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OLA	Orientalia lovaniensia analecta
OPKF	Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund
Or	Orientalia (NS)
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	<i>Old Testament Studies</i>
PSBA	<i>Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology</i>
PNA	<i>The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire</i> . Edited by K. Radner. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1998–2011.
RA	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
RIMA	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods
RIME	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods
RINAP	The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
RIa	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie</i> . Edited by E. Ebeling et al. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928–.
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAB	State Archives of Assyria Bulletin
SAACT	State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SBP	S. Langdon, <i>Sumerian and Babylonian Psalms</i> . Paris: P. Geuthner, 1909.

SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SSN	Studia semitica neerlandica
ST	<i>Studia theologica</i>
StudOr	Studia orientalia
T.	Field numbers of tablets excavated at Tell Tayinat
TCL	Textes cunéiformes. Musée du Louvre
TCS	Texts from Cuneiform Sources
TIM	Texts in the Iraq Museum
TDP	R. Labat, <i>Traité akkadien de diagnostics et pronostics médicaux</i> . Paris: Académie internationale d'histoire des sciences, 1951
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
VAB	Vorderasiatische Bibliothek
VAT	Tablets in the collections of the Staatliche Museen, Berlin
VOK	Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission
VS	Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTS	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	World Biblical Commentary
W	Field numbers of tablets excavated at Warka
WO	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
WVDOG	Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der deutschen Orientgesellschaft
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare
ZT	Field numbers of tablets excavated at Ziyaret Tepe

Notes to the Reader:

1. A number of points in this thesis have been informed by references to the author's previous publication, "Prophecy in K1285?: Re-evaluating the Divine Speech Episodes of Nabû," Pp. 59–89 in *'Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela': Prophecy in Israel, Assyria and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period*. Edited by Robert P. Gordon and Hans M. Barstad. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013.
2. Translations of Akkadian materials in the body of this thesis are the work of the author, unless indicated otherwise. For reasons of economy, the decision was made not to include transliterations of the original texts. However, access to the original texts, oftentimes with comparable translations, can be achieved following their citations in the footnotes.

1. Introduction: Getting our Bearings.

1.1 The *What, Why, and How* of This Study.

What follows is a comparative study of prophecy in Mari, Neo-Assyrian, and Hebrew sources. Admittedly, such an endeavour by no means is the first of its kind, and, nor will it be the last. Ever since the discovery of “prophecy” in Mesopotamian sources there have frequently been attempts to relate the cuneiform corpus to the biblical phenomenon, or visa versa. Indeed, from the early 1950s to the late 1970s, during the heyday of Mari research, studies dedicated to the analysis of prophecy at Mari invariably contained detailed discussions on various points of comparison to Hebrew prophecy as well.¹ Even in more recent research, especially following S. Parpola’s (re-)publication of the core corpus of Neo-Assyrian prophetic texts,² the interest in the relevance of Mesopotamian prophecy towards a further understanding of its Hebrew counterpart is far from abated.

Deficiencies remain, however, in spite of the growing volume of published research. For one thing, most do not distinguish clearly between the Mesopotamian sources, but often refer to prophecy in the Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources uncritically, as though they represent largely overlapping phenomena which are

¹ F. Ellermeier, *Prophetie in Mari und Israel* (Herzberg: Jungfer, 1968), Trans. T. Finch (Unpub. 1977); J.-G. Heintz “Les lettres ‘prophétiques’ des Archives Royales de Mari et l’Ancien Testament” (PhD diss., University of Strasbourg, 1968); E. Noort, *Untersuchungen zum Gottesbescheid in Mari: Die “Mari-prophetie” in der alttestamentlichen Forschung* (AOAT 202; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977); A. Schmitt, *Prophetischer Gottesbescheid in Mari und Israel: eine Strukturuntersuchung* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982).

² S. Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (SAA 9; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997).

almost devoid of points of contrast.³ Moreover, whilst Hebrew prophecy has been actively compared to that at Mari, few recent studies go beyond noting similarities, while more thorough analyses predate the extensive publication of additional sources later on. Finally, whereas a renewed interest in Neo-Assyrian prophecy has recently produced a number of sizeable rhetorical-critical studies—comparing the message content of Neo-Assyrian oracles to the Hebrew prophetic psalms, proto-Isaiah, and, more recently, several of the minor prophets—only brief attention is paid to historical reconstruction of the phenomenon. The intent of this study is to attempt to address these deficiencies.

Regardless of whether it is explicitly stated or not, most comparative studies of prophecy demonstrate a relatively simple four-step procedure. First, they invariably start with some idea of what constitutes “prophecy”—albeit informed by biblical studies, socio-anthropology, or the like—in any case, all studies already approach their task with a “construct of prophecy” beforehand.⁴ This step is both important and unavoidable, not least but because only when we have some idea of what we think prophecy is can we then proceed with what usually is the second step: collecting together otherwise disparate texts into a ‘corpus’ of material deemed to be related to prophecy. Third, most studies (though not all) individually analyze each corpus, seeking to allow the sources themselves to both inform and rework the original construct of prophecy, adapting it to a particular collection. Finally, comparative studies undertake to do what they intended all along: to

³ Some notable exceptions include the brief studies of K. van der Toorn, “Old Babylonian Prophecy Between the Oral and the Written,” *JNWSL* 24 (1998) 55–70; H. Huffmon, “A Company of Prophets: Mari, Assyria, Israel,” in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, ed. M. Nissinen (SBLSymS 13; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 47–70.

⁴ M. Nissinen, “Prophecy as Construct, Ancient and Modern,” in *‘Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela’: Prophecy in Israel, Assyria and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period*, eds. R. P. Gordon and H. M. Barstad (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013) 11–35.

compare observations gleaned from one corpus with those of another and draw their conclusions from that.

This procedure is also suited to the purposes of the present study, although not all steps are quite as straightforward as each other. In particular, the first and fourth steps require further clarification and are the subjects of the next two sections.

1.2 The Idea of “Prophecy” in Cuneiform Sources.

Complicating any attempt to identify prophecy in the cuneiform sources is that different people at different times have different ideas about what does or does not constitute “prophecy” and which texts should or should not be considered “prophetic.” During the early period of Neo-Assyrian research, it was evidently sufficient to identify prophecy in the cuneiform sources solely on the basis that the content of a text appeared to resemble biblical prophecy, begging the question of what was thought to constitute the latter.⁵ When prophecy was first recognised in the Mari materials, claims of its similarity to biblical prophecy were also frequently invoked, although by then what was meant by this was often more explicitly stated.⁶ Some claimed that it was a phenomenon primarily characterised by ecstasism or

⁵ A. Sayce, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religion of the Ancient Babylonians: Hibbert Lectures, 1887* (London: Williams & NorGate, 1887); A. Delattre, “The Oracles Given in Favour of Esarhaddon,” *BOR* 3 (1889) 25–31; S. Langdon, *Tammuz and Ishtar: A Monograph Upon Babylonian Religion and Theology, Containing Extensive Extracts from the Tammuz Liturgies and all the Arbela Oracles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914).

⁶ F. Böhl, “Profetisme en plaatsvervangend lijden in Assyrië en Israel: Vol. I,” *NedTT* 4 (1949–50) 81–91. M. Noth, “History and the Word of God in the Old Testament,” *BJRL* 32 (1950) 194–206; A. Lods & G. Dossin, “Une tablette inédite de Mari, intéressante pour l’histoire ancienne du prophétisme sémitique,” in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy Presented to Prof. Theodore H. Robinson by the Society for Old Testament Study on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, August 9th 1946*, ed. H. Rowley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1950) 103–10; W. von Soden, “Verkündigung des Gotteswillens durch prophetisches Wort in den altbabylonischen Briefen aus Mari,” *WO* 5 1 (1950) 397–403.

prognostication; for others, the prophet was a divinely commissioned messenger, a social critic, or a cultic functionary.⁷

Alternatively, still others have attempted to locate cuneiform prophecy within the wider matrix of religious phenomenology rather than in relation to the Hebrew phenomenon. More than a century ago, early German scholars Morris Jastrow and Maximilian Streck sought to distinguish prophecy from extispicy and other forms of technical divination.⁸ They argued that the latter—typically the domain of the *haruspex*—required a high degree of acquired competency in order to “indirectly” interpret naturally occurring “omens” or the allegedly divine responses to “Oracle Questions” formed in the livers of sheep, whereas prophetic “Oracle Speeches” were received “directly” from the deity without any recourse to technical expertise.

Almost a century later, the basic dichotomy between “indirect” and “direct”—now more commonly termed “inductive” and “non-inductive”—modes of divination is the most frequently employed paradigm to describe prophecy.⁹ The immediate advantage of this paradigm, of course, is that it uncouples the image of cuneiform prophecy from the Hebrew phenomenon, thereby avoiding the questionable tendency of prioritizing—if not super-imposing—one over the other. However, it is also a blunt axe, relegating prophecy together with a number of other “non-

⁷ For a recent survey of definitions of prophecy, see D. Petersen, “Defining Prophecy and Prophetic Literature,” in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, ed. M. Nissinen (SBLSymS 13; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 33–44.

⁸ M. Jastrow, *Die Religion Babyloniens und Assyriens 2.1* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1912) CLXI–CXCVIII.

⁹ See more recently: M. Weippert, “Assyrische Prophetien der Zeit Asarhaddons und Assurbanipals,” in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons in Literary, Ideological, and Historical Analysis. Papers of a Symposium Held in Cetona (Siena), June 26–28, 1980*, ed. F. Fales (OAC 17; Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente, 1981) 71–114, H. Huffmon, “Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy,” *ABD* 5: 477–82, H. Barstad, “No Prophets? Recent Developments in Biblical Prophetic Research and Ancient Near Eastern prophecy,” *JSOT* 57 (1993) 39–60, M. Nissinen, “What is Prophecy? An Ancient Near Eastern Perspective,” in *Inspired Speech*, eds. J. Kaltner and L. Stulman (London: T & T Clark, 2004) 17–37.

inductive” practices—most notably dreams¹⁰—so that further refinement is clearly necessary. Moreover, defining prophecy through apophatic reasoning, that is, by describing what prophecy is *not* (i.e. non-inductive), ultimately, is an unhelpful aide to understanding what prophecy *is*. To this extent, Nissinen’s recent emphasis on prophecy being a process of intermediated divine-human communication is a helpful supplement.¹¹

For the purpose of this study, therefore, prophecy is considered to be a mode of non-inductive divination, separate from dreams, that, ideally is denoted by the intermediation of allegedly divine messages to a human audience. However, no definition is ever final. Rather, it is only an initial point of entrance into the *hermeneutischer Zirkel*—that process of understanding which inevitably plays out between a scholarly construct that both delimits a corpus of texts as well as being further informed by them.

1.3 The Comparative Method.

The comparative method, briefly described as “the drawing of similarities and contrasts between traits of two or more cultures,”¹² has had a rather chequered history. In his recent survey on the use of Assyriology in biblical studies, M. Chavalas has described the relationship as “a century and a half of tension.”¹³

¹⁰ I. Nakata, “Two Remarks on the So-Called prophetic Texts from Mari,” *ASJ* 4 (1982) 143–48; J. Sasson, “Mari Dreams,” *JAOS* 103 (1983) 283–93; Despite his reservations over their relation to prophecy, M. Nissinen includes a sizable number of Mari dream reports in his anthology of prophetic texts (idem, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* [SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003] 59–71).

¹¹ M. Nissinen, “Spoken, Written, Quoted, and Invented: Orality and Writtenness in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy,” in *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*, eds. E. Ben Zvi and M. Floyd (SBLSymS 10; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 239–242.

¹² T. Longman, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1991).

¹³ M. Chavalas, “Assyriology and Biblical Studies: A Century and a Half of Tension,” in *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations*, eds. M. Chavalas and K. Younger, Jr. (JSOTSupp 341; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 21–67.

The primary problem, he concludes, has been a cyclical tendency in scholarship to initially “overemphasize the importance of new discoveries to the Old Testament”¹⁴ which is invariably followed by an equally flawed “skepticism, causing many to completely ignore comparative material altogether.”¹⁵ Only later, after further source materials are published and much of the initial furor settles, does more cautious and equitable scholarship prevail.

M. Malul addresses the methodological problems that have frequently beset comparative studies in biblical research.¹⁶ At the core, he notes, is the failure to distinguish between different types of comparative approaches, specifically: “historical comparisons” and “typological (or phenomenological) comparisons.” According to Malul, a historical comparison identifies similarities between “societies which belong to the same cultural context or the same ‘historic stream’,” and, assumes “a historical connection or a common tradition between the compared societies.”¹⁷ Alternatively, a typological approach harbors no such historic-genetic assumptions, but denotes the drawing of comparisons “between societies and cultures which are far apart both geographically and chronologically,” such that “no historical connection of any kind could exist between them.”¹⁸ The goal of the historical comparison, Malul says, is to explain parallels “on the basis of the assumption of some historical tie”¹⁹ and provide proofs of such a connection, whereas typological comparisons use similarities as heuristic evidence “from one

¹⁴ Chavalas, “Assyriology and Biblical Studies,” 43. This refers to what S. Sandmel referred to as “Parallelomania” (idem. “Parallelomania,” *JBL* 81 [1962] 1–13).

¹⁵ Chavalas, “Assyriology and Biblical Studies,” 43. In contrast to the “Parallelomania” of the former, R. Ratner and B. Zuckerman refer to the downplaying of clear informative correlations as “parallelophobia” (idem, “‘A Kid in Milk’?: New Photographs of KTU 1.23, Line 14,” *HUCA* 57 [1986] 15–60, esp. 62).

¹⁶ M. Malul, *The Comparative Method in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Legal Studies* (AOAT 227; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990) 21–78.

¹⁷ Malul, *Comparative Method*, 13.

¹⁸ Malul, *Comparative Method*, 14.

¹⁹ Malul, *Comparative Method*, 53.

culture for illuminating another culture and understanding it better, or for demonstrating certain institutions and underlining certain beliefs.”²⁰ Malul suggests that the failure to sufficiently distinguish between these approaches, with their different goals, can potentially lead to a failure to maintain the distinction between their practical conclusions.²¹

H. Barstad agrees with Malul’s view that the fundamental problem with comparative studies on prophecy is the failure to deal with methodological issues, especially the taxonomy of supposed “parallels.” However, he is doubtful that a clear distinction can be sustained and admits that “it may sometimes be very difficult, if not impossible, to decide whether a parallel phenomenon in two different but historically related cultures should be classified as ‘historical’ or ‘typological’.”²² In such cases, Barstad advises that the categories may have to be combined—a view which Malul seems also to have conceded.²³

The “contextual approach,” popularized by W. Hallo and his followers,²⁴ appears to represent just such a combination.²⁵ As with Malul’s historical

²⁰ Malul, *Comparative Method*, 17.

²¹ Malul, *Comparative Method*, 64.

²² H. Barstad, “*Comparare necesse est?* Ancient Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy in a Comparative Perspective,” in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, ed. M. Nissinen (SBLSymS 13; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 7.

²³ Malul, *Comparative Method*, 54.

²⁴ See especially the four volumes of the series *Scripture in Context*: C. Evans, W. Hallo, and J. White, eds. *Scripture in Context: Essays on the Comparative Method* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1980); W. Hallo, J. Moyer, and L. Perdue, eds. *Scripture in Context II: More Essays on the Comparative Method* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983); W. Hallo, B. Jones, and G. Mattingly, eds. *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature: Scripture in Context III* (ANETS 8; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990); K.L. Younger, Jr., W. Hallo, and B. Batto, eds. *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective* (ANETS 11; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991); and, more recently, M. Chavalas and K. Younger, Jr., eds. *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations*. JSOTSup 341. London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.

²⁵ Hallo specifically addresses the rationale and methodology of the Contextual Approach in idem., “Compare and Contrast: The Contextual Approach to Biblical Literature: Scripture in Context III,” in *The Bible in Light of Cuneiform Literature*, eds. W. Hallo, B. Jones, and G. Mattingly (ANETS 8; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990) 1–30. Although Malul accepts the fundamental validity of Hallo’s

comparisons approach, the contextual approach also assumes that the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern sources arise out of a common tradition and socio-cultural context. However, rather than “find the key to every biblical phenomenon in some ancient Near Eastern precedent,” the goal of the contextual approach is largely typological, that is, it seeks “to silhouette the biblical text against its wider literary and cultural environment and thus to arrive a proper assessment of the extent to which the biblical evidence reflects that environment or, on the contrary, is distinctive and innovative over against it.”²⁶

In order to do this, the contextual approach incorporates two methods: i) the traditional comparative approach, namely, the observation and examination of similarities, and ii) the contrastive approach, or negative comparisons, where attention is paid to the apparent differences and cultural distinctives. The immediate benefit of balancing comparisons with contrasts is that it reduces the possibility of distortion, that is, the submerging of one culture to another or the overstating of evidence of one phenomenon over another. In the past this has often meant the prioritizing of various biblical phenomena over extra-biblical ones, although there are numerous examples of a similar bias running in the other direction, as well.²⁷

Other potential abuses of the comparative method include the failure to recognize the limits of comparison or contrast so as to conclude more than the evidence indicates. Typically, the excesses of early comparative studies which had sought to argue for the phylogenesis of the biblical literature and Israel’s ancient institutions from Babylonian, Ugaritic, or Eblaite origins could fall into this

contextual approach, he appears to dismiss it as insufficient for the purposes of his historical comparative study, see idem, *Comparative Method*, 28–31, 55–56, esp. 83.

²⁶ Hallo, “Compare and Contrast,” 3.

²⁷ A number of examples of both of these can be found in Chavalas, “Assyriology and Biblical Studies.”

category.²⁸ More recently, others have attempted to date the production and redactional history of the Hebrew prophetic materials on the basis of their differences to Neo-Assyrian prophecy.²⁹

With particular relevance for this study are the criticisms of Sh. Talmon³⁰ and Malul³¹ against the tendency to reconstruct theoretical constructs in the Hebrew Bible to fill supposed “gaps” on the basis of external models and visa-versa. Equally salient is W. Lambert’s caution against the common inclination to “exaggerate the importance” of a particular text or specific observation and conclude that it monolithically represents *the* Babylonian view to be compared to *the* biblical view, despite the likelihood that there may have been a variety of views on any particular phenomena circulating ancient Mesopotamia.³²

A possible obstacle to the valid application of the comparative method to the study of ancient prophecy in the Mari, Neo-Assyrian, and Hebrew sources, is the glaring issue of disparate textual genres. Hallo³³ and Malul³⁴ both warn against “comparing incomparables” wherein ancient Near Eastern texts of one genre are compared with biblical texts of a different genre. However, not all agree that

²⁸ With respect to the problem in Ugarit studies, see M. Smith, *Untold Stories; The Bible and Ugaritic Studies in the Twentieth Century* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001); and “Ugarit Studies and the Hebrew Bible,” in *Congress volume, Oslo, 1998*, eds. A. Lemaire and M. Sæbø (VTS 80; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001) 327–55.

²⁹ M. de Jong, *Isaiah Among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets: Comparison of the Earliest Stages of the Isaiah Tradition and the Neo-Assyrian Prophecies* (VTS 117; Leiden: Brill, 2007); R. Mack, “Neo-Assyrian Prophecy and the Hebrew Bible: A Comparative Analysis” (PhD diss., Hebrew Union College, 2010).

³⁰ Sh. Talmon, “The ‘Comparative Method’ in Biblical Interpretation: Principles and Problems,” in *Congress Volume: Göttingen 1977* (VTS 29; Leiden: Brill, 1977) 320–56.

³¹ Malul, *Comparative Method*, 64–68.

³² W. Lambert, “A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis,” *JTS* 16 (1965) 289–300.

³³ Hallo, “Compare and Contrast,” 8–9.

³⁴ Malul, *Comparative Method*, 68–69.

comparisons between different genres are altogether insurmountable.³⁵ Even Malul himself acknowledges the possibility so long as one remains sensitive to the generic contexts within which the information gleaned is found when reaching historical conclusions.³⁶

By dint of their common geographic, linguistic, and cultural contexts, the study of prophecy in the Mari, Neo-Assyrian, and Hebrew sources could be regarded as a historical comparison, wherein the various phenomena are explained through some kind of historical connection. Indeed, several previous scholars have tried, and failed, to trace the origins of Mesopotamian prophecy on the basis of a “Western Hypothesis.”³⁷ A less speculative approach, however, is provided by the contextual method, whereby the characteristics of prophecy from one corpus may be “silhouetted” against that of the other two for the purpose of assessing the extent to which it resembles them or not. Ever mindful to avoid the various pitfalls identified above and to maintain a sensitivity to the textual contexts from which the information on prophecy is gleaned, what follows is a contextual approach to comparing the three corpora.

1.4 Outline.

Having already defined “prophecy” for the purposes of this study,³⁸ chapters 2, 4, and 6 present the corpora of sources for our investigation of Mari, Neo-Assyrian,

³⁵ K. L. Younger, Jr., “The “Contextual Method”: Some West Semitic Reflections,” *COS* 3: xxxix; T. Longman, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1991) 31-32.

³⁶ Malul, *Comparative Method*, 70-75.

³⁷ J. Ross, “Prophecy in Hamath, Israel, and Mari,” *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (1970) 1-28; A. Malamat, *Mari and the Early Israelite Experience: Schweich Lectures 1984* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 84-85; and “A Forerunner of Biblical Prophecy: The Mari Documents,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, eds. P. Miller, P. Hanson and S. McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) 33-52. Cf. M. Ellis “Observations on Mesopotamian Oracles and Prophetic Texts: Literary and Historiographic Considerations,” *JCS* 41 (1989) 138-39, 145-46.

³⁸ See section 1.1.

and Hebrew prophecy, respectively. The texts themselves are not provided, but each will be briefly introduced, with comments noting their prophetic character and content. Chapters 3, 5, and 7, provide individual analyses of these corpora along seven lines: Prompting Prophecy, the Prophets, Prophetic Deities, Venues for Prophetic Activity, Means for Delivering Oracles, Messages of Oracles, and the Responses to Prophecy.³⁹ Chapter 8, “Synthesis,” will summarize the data from these analyses, bringing the results of each to bear upon one another. Accordingly, apparent similarities and differences will be noted and examined. Chapter 9, the “Conclusions and Implications,” chapter will then suggest the way in which Mari, Neo-Assyrian, and Hebrew prophecy broadly relate to each other and the implications for comparative research of prophecy in the ancient Near East.

³⁹ These categories commonly occur in the Mari Letters and are adopted from there. For discussion of the Mari Letters and these categories, see section 2.3 below.

2. Corpus of Mari Texts Related to Prophecy.

Study of the prophetic phenomenon at Mari is somewhat hindered by the sporadic nature in which the relevant texts have been published, or, in some cases, even re-published. Jean-Marie Durand's seminal 1988 publication assembled most (though not all) of the then known letters and included more than a dozen new ones.¹ Since then, references to prophets and prophetic oracles have continued to appear in many newly published texts. The anthologies of Jimmy J. Roberts and Martti Nissinen,² now already a decade old, provide transliterations and translations for most of the relevant material, except, of course, the most recently published texts. To date, the most comprehensive list of sources relevant to the study of the prophetic phenomenon at Mari can be found in Jonathan Stökl's investigation of prophecy in the Old Babylonian period,³ most of which overlaps with the below list despite a few notable exceptions. For the purposes of this study, the following materials are relevant to an understanding of the prophetic phenomenon at Mari:

¹ J.-M. Durand, *Archives épistolaires de Mari I/1* (ARM 26/1; Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988),

² J. Roberts, "The Mari Prophetic Texts in Transliteration and English Translation," in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002) 157–253; Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 13–91.

³ J. Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Comparison* (CHANE 56; Leiden: Brill, 2012) 29–34.

2.1 Materials Recovered from Mari:

Letters which refer to prophets and/or oracles:

- ARM 26 195–223. This series of letters, many of which were written during the “Yamina revolt” and the war with Ešnunna,⁴ are from various officials to Zimri-Lim, the king of Mari.⁵ Durand has collected them together under the rubric “*textes prophétiques*” apparently because they contain references to prophetic personnel (*āpilum*, *muḥḥûm*, etc.) and quote their divine utterances.⁶ This collection is not exhaustive, however, as several letters also report prophetic activity elsewhere in the same volume.
- ARM 26 243 (A.4400). In this letter, an official reports on the dilapidated state of a house and quotes the ominous utterance with which the prophets (*muḥḥûm*) have spoken against it.
- ARM 26 371 (A.428). Yarim-Addu, the king’s envoy to Babylon,⁷ reports to Zimri-Lim the activity of a local prophet (*āpilum*) whose divine outbursts lambaste Išme-Dagan for taking refuge in the palace and indirectly criticize Hammurabi for supporting him.
- ARM 26 237 (A.994 = ARM 10 50). In order to persuade her son the king that he “should not be negligent in protecting himself,” Addu-Duri informs Zimri-Lim of her disturbing dream and the divine utterance of a prophetess (*muḥḥûtum*).

⁴ On the historical setting of the letters, see Durand, *Archives*, 399–402; D. Charpin, “Le contexte historique et géographique des prophéties dans les textes de Mari,” *BCSMS* 23 (1992) 21–31.

⁵ ARM 26 222 is addressed to Dariš-libur, an official charged with the king’s wardrobe (ARM 26 56), evidently intending its contents to reach the king.

⁶ Two texts, ARM 26 201 and 216, omit reference to a divine utterance and refer only to prophetic personnel.

⁷ J. Sasson, “The Posting of Letters with Divine Messages,” in *Florilegium Marianum 2: Recueil d’études à la mémoire de Maurice Birot*, eds. D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand (Mémoires de NABU 3; Paris: SÉPOA, 1994) 312.

- ARM 26 414 (A.431+ = ARM 2 108). Among other administrative matters, Yasim-El informs Zimri-Lim of Atamrum, a “prophet of Šamaš” (*āpilum ša šamši*), who claims to have a divine message for the king but needs a scribe to write it down.
- ARM 26 194 (A.4260). This letter, which contains several oracles of Šamaš, presents itself as having been sent to the king by a prophet (*āpilum*) rather than by an official or a member of the royal entourage as is otherwise attested. Durand identifies the prophetic sender and the letter’s divine oracles with those referred to in the contents of ARM 26 414.
- ARM 27 32 (M.13741). Alongside his agriculture report, Zakira-Ḥammû also informs the king of prophets (*muhḥûm*) whom he apparently describes as “elders of Gaššum” (*šībūtum Gaššim*), although a break in line six obscures the connection between these designations.
- FM 3 152 (M.9451).⁸ A poorly preserved letter from Manatan that records “five prophets” (*ḥamšat muḥḥû*).
- FM 6 1 (A.3760).⁹ In addition to updating the king on the progress made in restoring the temple, Laʾum also reports on the activity of a prophet (*āpilum*) and quotes the oracle he spoke. Unfortunately the text is broken at this point and most of the oracle’s content is lost.

⁸ G. Ozan, “Les Lettres de Manatân,” in *Florilegium marianum III: Recueil d’études à la mémoire d’Marie-Thérèse Barrelet*, eds. D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand (Mémoires de NABU 4; Paris: SÉPOA, 1997) 303.

⁹ D. Charpin, “Prophètes et rois dans le Proche-Orient amorrite: Nouvelles données, nouvelles perspectives,” in *Florilegium marianum VI: Recueil d’études à la mémoire d’André Parrot*, eds. D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand (Mémoires de NABU 7; Paris: SÉPOA, 2002) 35.

- FM 6 45 (M.9717).¹⁰ This text refers to the oracular activity of Irra-gamil who in the administrative text ARM 21 333 is identified as a prophet (*muḥḥûm*) of the deity Nergal.
- FM 7 38 (A.1968)¹¹ Nur-Sîn repeats a lengthy oracle uttered by a prophet (*āpilum*) from Aleppo which both reminds Zimri-Lim of the divine aid given to him in his dynastic struggle and exhorts the king to rule judiciously and piously.
- FM 7 39 (A.1121+).¹² Apparently written in response to the king's orders, Nur-Sîn reports on the activity of various unidentified prophets (*āpilum*) and quotes their divine utterances.

Royal inscriptions which refer to prophets:

- The Epic of Zimri-Lim.¹³ A hitherto unpublished text, Durand refers to six lines wherein Zimri-Lim is described as having witnessed a prophet (*āpilum*) who speaks a favourable oracle of divine support.

Cultic texts with prophets:

- FM 3 2 (A.3165) and 3 (A.1249b+).¹⁴ Prophets (*muḥḥê*) and prophetesses (*muḥḥâtum*) are mentioned in rituals associated with the goddess Ištar. Stökl questions whether these texts attest to a single or separate rituals.¹⁵

¹⁰ F. van Koppen, "Seized by the Royal Order: The Households of Sammêtar and Other Magnates at Mari," in *Florilegium marianum VI: Recueil d'études à la mémoire d'André Parrot*, eds. D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand (Mémoires de NABU 7; Paris: SÉPOA, 2002) 356–57.

¹¹ J.-M. Durand, "Le mythologème du combat entre le Dieu de l'Orage et la Mer en Mésopotamie," *MARI 7* (1993) 43–45; see also idem, *Florilegium marianum VII: Le culte d'Addu d'Alep et l'affaire d'Alahtum* (Mémoires de NABU 8; Paris: SÉPOA, 2002) 134–37.

¹² J.-M. Durand, *Le culte d'Addu*, 137–40.

¹³ For text, see Durand, *Archives*, 393 (lines 137–42).

¹⁴ J.-M. Durand and M. Guichard, "Les rituels de Mari," in *Florilegium marianum III. Recueil d'études à la mémoire de Marie-Thérèse Barrelet*, eds. D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand (Mémoires de NABU 4 Paris: SÉPOA, 1997) 52–58 and 59–63, respectively.

¹⁵ Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 34 n. 43.

Administrative texts with prophets:

- ARM 9 22; 21 333 (dupl. ARM 23 446); 22 167; 22 326. Among other recipients, these texts record the outlay of garments also to prophets (*āpilum*, *muḥḥûm*) and prophetesses (*muḥḥûtum*).
- A.4676.¹⁶ This brief text mentions the same “prophet of Ninḥursag” (*muḥḥû ša Ninḥursagga*) as occurs in ARM 22 167, whence it was probably extracted.¹⁷
- ARM 25 15 (A.4675); 142 (A.4674); T.82 ix 2–4.¹⁸ These texts record the outlay of valuable metallic items to various recipients including prophets (*muḥḥûm*, *āpilum*). In particular, ARM 25 142 indicates that a silver ring was given to a *muḥḥûm* “when he delivered an oracle to the king” (*inūma têtam ana šarrim iddinu*).
- A.3796 and M.11436.¹⁹ These texts record the outlay of a donkey (A.3796) and silver (M.11436) to the prophet (*āpilum*) Lupaḥum whose activities on behalf of the king are more extensively described in ARM 26 199.
- M.11299.²⁰ This text records the outlay of silver to several personnel from the temple of Annunitum including Šelebum and Ili-ḥanaya, both of whom are identified elsewhere as *assinu* and with having spoken prophetic utterances.²¹
- M.5529.²² An oath text that records three prophetesses (*muḥḥûtum*), unaffiliated with either a temple or deity, listed among the female population of the kingdom.

¹⁶ Unpublished. For text, see Durand, *Archives*, 381.

¹⁷ For this suggestion, see M. Nissinen, *References to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources* (SAAS 7; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1998) 86.

¹⁸ Unpublished. For text, see Durand, *Archives*, 380.

¹⁹ Unpublished. For texts, see Durand, *Archives*, 396.

²⁰ Unpublished. For text, see Durand, *Archives*, 399.

²¹ For Šelebum, see ARM 26 197, 198, 213; for Ili-ḥanaya, see ARM 26 212.

²² Unpublished. For text, see J.-M. Durand, “La religion Amorrite en Syrie à L’époque des archives de Mari,” in *Mythologie et religion des sémites occidentaux*, vol. 1, ed. G. del Olmo Lete (OLA 162; Leuven: Peeters, 2008) 423.

- M.18192.²³ Administrative text that records a prophet (*muhhûm*) as an “official of DN” (*šukkalum*).

2.2 Old Babylonian Cuneiform Texts Related to Prophecy from Elsewhere.

In addition to the materials recovered from Mari, references to prophecy also occur in a number of texts from a wide variety of other locations of the same period. Such sources are valuable for understanding the larger context in which the phenomenon at Mari was a part, and, no doubt, resembled. Outside Mari, prophets are attested in lexical lists, temple ration lists, and miscellaneous receipts; prophetic oracles occur in letters and royal inscriptions:

- LÚ=š_a lexical list recensions: LÚ A (MSL 12.5.22), LÚ B (MSL 12.5.32), LÚ C (MSL 12.5.42), LÚ D (MSL 12.5.62), LÚ E' (MSL 12.5.72).²⁴ In these variations on the Old Babylonian LÚ=š_a lexical list, the titles for male and female prophets (*ma/uḫhûm*, *muhhûtum*) are arranged with their Sumerian equivalents.
- TIM 7 111 (IM 50.852).²⁵ A ration text from T. ed-Dēr that records an outlay of oil to numerous temple personnel, including a prophet (*muhhûm*).
- TCL 01 57 (AO.03768);²⁶ A contract, probably from Dilbat (T. Dulaim),²⁷ that mentions a prophet (LÚ.GUB.BA) named Aḫu-waqar who acts as a witness for a landsite purchase.

²³ Unpublished. For text, see J.-M. Durand, “Un habit pour un oracle! À propos d’une prophétie de Mari,” in *Muhibbe Darga Armağanı*, eds. T. Tarhan, A. Tibet and E. Konyar (Istanbul: Sadberk Hanım Müzesi, 2008) 231–35.

²⁴ M. Civil, *The Series Lú = ša and Related Texts* (MSL 12; Rome: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1969) 59, 177–78, 194, 207, 212.

²⁵ D. Edzard, *Altbabylonische Rechts- und Wirtschaftsurkunden aus Tell ed-Dēr im Iraq Museum, Baghdad* (ABAW NF 72 München: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1970) 134.

²⁶ F. Thureau-Dangin, *Lettres et contrats de l’époque de la première dynastie babylonienne* (TCL 1; Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1910) Pl. XXXII.

²⁷ F. Thureau-Dangin, *Lettres et contrats*, vii n. 4.

- TCL 10 34 (AO.06370), 39 (AO.07034), 69 (AO.08501).²⁸ From Larsa, these contracts contain references to prophets (LÚ.GUB.BA) and prophetesses (SAL LÚ.GUB.BA).
- Larsa “Ritual” Tablet (BLMJ 3127).²⁹ Prophets (LÚ.GUB.BA) are listed among those cultic functionaries who are recipients of oil disbursements on the feast day of the deity Utu in Larsa.
- KTT 53 and 306.³⁰ Among the texts recently recovered from Tuttul (T. Bi’a), Stökl notes a reference to the receipt of sesame by prophets (*muḥḥê*) in KTT 306 and has suggested identifying the attestations of *a-PI-lu-um* in KTT 53 with the term *āpilum*.³¹
- CB 3357.³² A rations list excavated from Ašnakkum (Chagar Bazar), Stökl has noted that it records an outlay of beer to Eḫilp-Addu, a prophet (*muḥḥûm*) of Adad of Aleppo.³³
- MDP 10 7;³⁴ 18 171.³⁵ From Susa, two texts mention prophetic personnel. The donation list MDP 10 7 associates prophets (LÚ.GUB.BA) with the temples of

²⁸ C.-F. Jean, *Contrats de Larsa I* (TCL 10; Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1926) Pls. XXXIV, XXXIX, LXI.

²⁹ J. Westenholz, A. Westenholz, *Cuneiform Inscriptions in the Collection of the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem: The Old Babylonian Inscriptions* (CM 33; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 3–81.

³⁰ M. Krebern timer, *Tall Bi’a/Tuttul – II: Die altorientalischen Schriftenfunde* (Ausgrabungen in Tall Bi’a/Tuttul 2 / WVD OG 100 Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 2001) 55–56, 134–35.

³¹ Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 31. Stökl (*ibid.*, 32) also accepts Durand and Marti’s suggestion to read *mu^l-ḫu^l-im* in KTT 359: 4” (J.-M. Durand and L. Marti, “Chroniques du Moyen-Euphrate 3: Les documents du Tell Bi’a,” *RA* 98 [2004] 146). However, neither Krebern timer’s copy (*Tall Bi’a/Tuttul*, Pl. 47) nor my own inspection of detailed photographs of the tablet are able to affirm such a bold reading.

³² D. Lacambre and A. Millet Albà, “Textes administratifs,” in *Chagar Bazar III: Les trouvailles épigraphiques et sigillographiques du chantier 1 (2000–2002)*, eds. Ö. Tunca and A. Baghda (APHAO 6; Louvain: Peeters, 2007) 106.

³³ Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 31.

³⁴ V. Scheil, *Textes élamites-sémitiques* (MDP 10; Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1908) 25–26.

³⁵ G. Dossin, *Mission en Susiane: autres textes sumériens et accadiens* (MDP 18; Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1927); see also V. Scheil, “Notules,” *RA* 14 (1917) 92–93.

Bēlet-ekallim and Utu; a second text, MDP 18 171, includes a reference to a prophet (*muḫḫûm*), named Ribbiya.

- VS 16 144 (VAT 7888).³⁶ In his letter to Šina-bēlāšu, Ili-Imitti promises the response of a group of ten prophets (LÚ.GUB.BA).
- FLP 1674 and 2064.³⁷ Through the oracles recorded in these texts the goddess Kititum speaks directly to the king of Ešnunna, Ibalpiel II. According to Ellis, “written oracles” probably have their origins in utterances delivered within the temple of Kititum, where they were discovered, and, possibly, represent “the temple’s records of the oracular communications.”³⁸
- W19.900.³⁹ According to Dalley, this text recovered from Uruk is a first person account of a prophet who narrates to his anonymous recipient the two divine utterances purportedly spoken to him by the goddess Nanaya/Inanna at the Eanna temple. It should be noted that, due to the absence of a human intermediary in the text, Dalley occasionally equivocates as to whether the oracles actually reflect a genuine prophetic event or if they are examples of “pseudo-prophecy” written by self-serving scribes lobbying for tax breaks. Alternatively, B. Pongratz-Leisten has even suggested that the entire scene

³⁶ O. Schroder, *Altbabylonische Briefe: mit Zeichen- und Namenlisten* (VS 16; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1917) pl. 59. For transliteration and translation (German), see R. Frankena, *Briefe aus dem Berliner Museum* (AbB 6; Leiden: Brill, 1974) 92–93.

³⁷ M. Ellis, “The Goddess Kititum Speaks to King Ibalpiel: Oracle Texts from Ishchali,” *MARI* 5 (1987) 239–40, 258–66.

³⁸ Ellis, “Oracles Texts from Ishchali,” 253.

³⁹ Unpublished text. For the most recent transliteration, translation, and discussion of the text, see S. Dalley, “Old Babylonian Prophecies at Uruk and Kish,” in *Opening the Tablet Box: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Benjamin R. Foster*, eds. S. Melville and A. Slotsky (CHANE 42; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 86–92. For an earlier copy with notes, see J. van Dijk, “Die Tontafeln aus dem Palast des Šīnkāšid,” in *XVIII. vorläufiger Bericht über die von dem Deutschen Archäologischen Institut und der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft aus Mitteln der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft unternommenen Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka. Winter 1959/60*, ed. H. Lenzen (ADOG 7; Berlin: Mann, 1962) 61–62, pl. 28.

reflects the outcome of a dream incubation.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the text does refer to what the goddess has “said” (*qabû*) to a human addressee, formally marks the deity’s utterances as direct quotes (*umma*), and contains no indication that other methods of divination were employed—all of which fulfill the basic criteria of what may be called prophecy in this study.

▪ RIME E4.3.7.7.⁴¹ From Kish, the Sumerian-Akkadian bilingual inscription C of Samsu-iluna records the divine utterance jointly delivered to the king by the deities Zababa and Inanna (of Uruk).⁴²

2.3 Discussion of Mari Letters.

Among the various textual sources, the letters are the most numerous. They provide the richest and most detailed depiction of prophets and prophetic activity at Mari. Accordingly, a brief discussion of the genre and their representation of prophecy is in order.

A prominent feature of the letters from Mari is the relatively fixed structure in which they were written.⁴³ There are three main sections:

- I) Opening.
- II) Context of Report.
- III) Report on a Prophetic Event.

The first section is the standard introductory opening common to letter writing at ancient Mari. This section is largely unremarkable with the exception

⁴⁰ B. Pongratz-Leisten, *Herrschaftswissen in Mesopotamien: Formen der Kommunikation zwischen Gott und König in 2. und 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr* (SAAS 10; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1999) 49–50.

⁴¹ D. Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 BC)* (RIME 4; University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1990) 386–87.

⁴² On this specific identification of Inanna with her Urukean manifestation, see Dalley, *Old Babylonian Prophecies*, 92–94.

⁴³ Previous studies on the structure of the Mari prophetic letters include A. Scharf, “Combining Prophetic Oracles in Mari Letters and Jeremiah 36,” *JANES* 23 (1995) 75–93; J. Craghan, “The ARM X ‘Prophetic’ Texts: Their Media, Style, and Structure,” *JANES* 6 (1974) 39–57; K. Koch, “Die Briefe ‘profetischen’ Inhalts aus Mari,” *UF* 4 (1972) 53–77.

that it informs us of the letter's author and its primary addressee. Letters were sent by various officials, cult functionaries, and court personnel from across Mari's sphere of influence. Of those recovered, the vast majority of letters represent the final decade or so of the kingdom, and thus, were typically addressed to its last ruler, Zimri-Lim.

In the second section, the context of the report, authors outline the background circumstances of the prophetic event and explain their purpose for writing. More often, however, the authors do not provide such information, but directly proceed to report the prophecy. In a handful of texts, officials might even narrate other matters, unrelated to the subsequent prophecy, thus indicating how the reporting of oracular activity was considered unsensational and among their normal administrative duties.

The third section is the report of prophecy proper. This section often constitutes the bulk of these letters and typically has a simple three-part format that includes:

- 1) Introduction to the Prophetic Event. (Opening bracket)
- 2) Quotation of the Prophet's Speech.
- 3) Epilogue. (Closing bracket)

The introduction is usually composed according to a fixed structure and briefly narrates who did what where. W. Moran was the first to observe this structure and identified several "constant elements" which occur together here in a predictably fixed order.⁴⁴ Despite the number of additional texts that have been published since Moran's original investigation, the "constant elements" that Moran identified remain largely valid. With only some minor re-wording, necessary so as

⁴⁴ W. Moran, "New Evidence From Mari on the History of Prophecy," *Bib* 50 (1969) 24–25.

to accommodate the increased number of syntagms possible for a particular “element,” the fixed structure of the introduction includes:

- a) The prophetic speaker;
- b) The geographical or cognitive context of the prophetic speech;
- c) Verb(s) of physical action, oral communication, or both.

The author’s presentation of a quotation of the prophet’s speech corresponds to the fourth and fifth elements of Moran’s typology.⁴⁵ Inclusion of quotative formulae explicitly indicates that, up until the epilogue, everything that follows is to be understood as direct speech, and that the prophet—as the immediately antecedent subject—is its speaker. Next, is the actual quotation of the prophet’s speech. Depending on the selectivity of the author and/or the prophet’s own presentation of the oracle,⁴⁶ arrangement of the prophet’s speech may correspond to one of several variations on the following pattern:

umma/ummāmi (+ Ind. Pn.) + Prophet’s comments + *umma/ummāmi* (+ Ind. Pn.) + Divine Speech

With the exception of FM 7 39, however, the rest do not wholly conform to this pattern. Instead, their presentation of the prophet’s speech may, or may not, include the contents of the prophet’s own comments and / or explicitly mark their quotation of divine speech. Thus, four patterns for the presentation of prophetic speech emerge:

Prophet’s comments + prophet’s **explicit** quotation of divine speech.⁴⁷

umma/ummāmi (+ Indp. Pn.) + Prophet’s Comments + *umma/ummāmi* (+ Ind. Pn.) + Divine Speech

Prophet’s comments + prophet’s **implicit** quotation of divine speech.⁴⁸

umma/ummāmi (+ Indp. Pn.) + Prophet’s Comments + Divine Speech

⁴⁵ Moran, “New Evidence,” 25.

⁴⁶ On the various discussions surrounding an author’s quotation of a prophet, see Nissinen, “Orality and Writtenness,” 235-71.

⁴⁷ FM 7 39.

⁴⁸ ARM 26 205, 210, 220, 221.

Prophet's **explicit** quotation of divine speech.⁴⁹
umma/ummāmi DN + Divine Speech

Prophet's **implicit** quotation of divine speech:⁵⁰
umma/ummāmi (+ Indp. Pn.) + Divine Speech

For most Mari letters that report prophecy, the final part of the report is the inclusion of a postscript that exhibits a somewhat fixed structure of up to three elements that occur in a fairly predictable order, including:

- a) An account of the author's transmission to the recipient.
- b) An account of and / or recommendation for evaluation by means of technical divination.
- c) Giving of recompense to the prophet(ess).

In summary then, Mari letters which contain reports of prophecy can be seen to have the following basic structure and contents:

- I) Letter opening.
- II) Letter context.
- III) Prophetic event report.
 - 1) Introduction to prophetic event.
 - a) The prophetic speaker;
 - b) The geographical context for the prophetic speech;
 - c) Verb(s) of physical action, oral communication, or both.
 - 2) Quotation of prophet's speech.
 - 3) Epilogue.
 - a) Transmission.
 - b) Evaluation.
 - c) Reward.

There are many ways one could analyse prophecy at Mari, and, arguably, this task requires an even more thorough undertaking than may be reasonably expected here. Nevertheless, to establish at least a basic understanding of the phenomenon, a discussion of the seven key elements will be arranged roughly along the lines of

⁴⁹ ARM 26 194, 208, 213, 223; FM 7 38.

⁵⁰ ARM 26 195, 197, 198, 199, 200, 202, 204, 206, 207, 209, 211, 212, 214, 215, 218, 219, 221bis–223, 237, 243, 371, 414; FM 6 1.

how they are presented in the letters themselves. These elements include:

Prompting Prophecy, the Prophets, Prophetic Deities, Venues for Prophetic Activity, Means for Delivering Oracles, Messages of Oracles, and the Responses to Prophecy.

3. Mari Prophetic Phenomenon.

In this chapter I will investigate the phenomenon of prophecy in the Mari sources in accordance with the elements outlined at the end of the previous chapter. It is important to note that these categories of information are not completely without ancient precedent. From our brief discussion of the structure of the letters themselves, it can be seen that both their authors and recipients were keenly interested in these elements and communicated them according to a somewhat formal pattern in the letters. What follows then is an analysis of each category with the intention of gaining deeper insight into the phenomenon as a whole.

3.1 What Prompted Prophetic Oracles?

About half of all Mari prophetic sources begin by explaining something of their oracle's context. Among the more mundane details, a text's author may briefly preview the oracle's subject matter¹ or they could include a short temporal note on when the prophetic event occurred.² Alternatively, there is also a handful of texts in

¹ There is a group of six texts which indicate how, before proceeding to report the oracle, authors were keen to introduce the relevant subject matter from the letter's outset. This background information is formally prefaced by the preposition *aššum* ("as for, concerning") and covers an eclectic array of subject matter which includes: shipping (FM 6 1), building and demolition projects (ARM 26 221bis and 243, respectively), political rumour (ARM 26 210), and even the naming of a little girl (ARM 26 239).

² Four texts provide information related to an oracular event's temporal context. Two of these briefly recount the period of time which has passed between when the oracular utterance was given and the

which the author supplies important background information that allows insight into what prompted oracles to be given and why they were reporting them, these include: sacrifices, entreaties, and inquiries..³

3.1.1 Sacrifices.

The authors of the Mari texts describe several circumstances in which oracles could be prompted. On the basis of ARM 26 209 and 215, F. Ellermeier had originally proposed that deities were prompted to speak in response to sacrifices.⁴ In ARM 26 209, Mukannišum reports that, on completion of the sacrifice (*nīqum*) offered to Dagan “for the life” of the king, two *aplûm* arose in close succession proclaiming divine messages in opposition to Babylon.

ARM 26 209: 4–7.

I sacrificed the sacrifice to Dagan for the life of my lord, (then) a prophet of Dagan of Tuttul arose and said...

That the sacrifice and the prophetic activity of the *aplûm* are to be considered related is implied by their proximity in the text and the presence of a *ma* particle between them. Syntactically, then, the sacrifice appears to function as a subordinate clause to indicate the conditions that produced the prophecy.⁵

A more explicit connection between sacrifice and prophecy occurs in ARM 26 215. In this text, Lanasûm describes them as events among a series of cultic activities which transpired in the city following the arrival of the king’s offering:

ARM 26 21: 9–16.

Now, my lord’s sacrifice safely arrived in the city

writing of the report (ARM 26 208 and 213). Another couple of texts provide more extended descriptions (ARM 26 210: 5–8 and 219: 4’–5’).

³ On the latter, see section 3.7.1 “Responses to Prophetic Oracle” below.

⁴ Ellermeier, *Prophetie in Mari*, 96.

⁵ On the *ma* particle and its function in discourse, see AGA §7.4c. Alternatively, A. Malamat, one of the text’s earliest translators, considers the connection to be unclear (idem, “Prophetic Revelations in New Documents from Mari and the Bible,” [VTS 15; Leiden: Brill, 1966] 215).

and was sacrificed before Dagan,
and the land⁶ feasted
and the entire city greatly rejoiced at my lord's sacrifice!
and a prophet arose before Dagan and said as follows...

Here, the sacrifice and oracular utterance are also geographically linked; Lanasûm describing these events as having both occurred *pān Dagan* ("before Dagan").⁷ The syntax of the message also reinforces the link between these elements.

Unpublished at the time and, thus, unknown to Ellermeier, a third text further confirms his proposal that cultic sacrifices could prompt an oracular event. In ARM 26 219 an unknown author makes both a temporal and a geographical connection between the two elements:

ARM 26 219: 4'-5'.

On the day of the sacrifice, a prophet of Ninḫursag arose in the temple of Ninḫursag and said...

Admittedly, all of these examples fall slightly short of conclusively demonstrating the kind of "cause and effect" relationship that Ellermeier's proposal suggests. Nevertheless, the close proximity of these elements as well as their shared temporal and geographical contexts points to the probability of a relationship between the two activities. Thus, it is quite imaginable that prophetic oracles could be prompted by the performance of cultic sacrifices.

3.1.2 Entreaties.

In addition to sacrifices, oracles could be solicited by royal entreaties mediated by a prophet. In ARM 26 199, Sammetar recounts that the first of several

⁶ W. Heimpel mentions that "food offered to the gods was eaten communally in Mesopotamia" (idem, *Letters to the King of Mari: A New Translation, with Historical Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* [MC 12; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003] 261).

⁷ The phrase "before Dagan" undoubtedly refers to that location in front of the carved cult statue of Dagan associated with Dagan's temple in Tuttul. Referring to the statue of Dagan, presumably brought out from the temple to join the public feast.

oracles he reports was actually given in response to a royal petition which the prophet Lupaḥum had presented to Dagan on the king's behalf.

ARM 26 199: 5–16.

Lupaḥum, the prophet of Dagan, arrived from Tuttul.

The message with which my lord charged him in Saggaratum,

“Entrust me to Dagan of Terqa,”

He delivered that message, and

they answered him as follows:

“Wherever you go, you will always encounter peace of mind! Battering ram
and siege tower are given to you. They will go by your side and keep you
company!”

This is the message they answered him in Tuttul.

The king's message is brief, resulting in its meaning, which pivots upon the word *piqdanni*, being somewhat difficult to interpret. Durand, the text's original editor, translated the term “Fais la contre-épreuve,” understanding it on the basis of *piqittum* to refer to the king's desire that the subsequent prophecy, which was received at Tuttul, be verified by extispicy in Terqa.⁸ Sasson follows this and translates “Investigate for me (the oracles) before Dagan of Terqa.”⁹ While Schart, who prefers to retain the usual sense of *paqādum* and render the phrase as “entrust me,” nevertheless acknowledges that he does so assuming a “broader meaning of the phrase” within which Durand's understanding that Zimri-Lim seeks an extispicy is “an important aspect of it.”¹⁰ Likewise, Nissinen, who also prefers to translate the term as “entrust me,” admits that “in concrete terms, this probably means investigating oracles.”¹¹

In contrast, Heimpel provides a very different explanation of the king's message. Heimpel interprets it to reflect Zimri-Lim's desire to entreat the

⁸ Durand, *Archives*, 388, 426–429.

⁹ J. Sasson, “Water Beneath Straw: Adventures of Prophetic Phrase in the Mari Archives,” in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield*, eds. Z. Zevit, S. Gitin and M. Sokoloff (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995) 600, 602.

¹⁰ Schart, “Combining Prophetic Oracles,” 85.

¹¹ Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 30, 32.

reassurance of his status under Dagan's protection on the basis that "the expression 'to entrust PN₁ to PN₂' (*paqādum* + PN₁ in the accusative *ana* PN₂) is a common, unproblematic variation of the fuller phrase 'to entrust PN₁ to the hand/authority of PN₂.'" ¹² The lack of any reference to extispicy (*têrtum*), more usual when indicating technical verification, ¹³ as well as the king's self-referential inclusion of the first person accusative suffix *-nim*, which clearly identifies him as the direct object of the verb (i.e. "entrust me..."), suggests that Heimpel's explanation is to be preferred. Accordingly then, the king's message reflects a royal petition, entreating confirmation of Dagan's divine protection against the Ešnunnean threat. ¹⁴

The response, as indicated by two occurrences of the verb *apālum* ("to answer"), closely follows the entreaty. In each instance, however, the subject of the verb is plural ("they answered") despite the entreaty being directed to a single deity, Dagan. Something similar occurs in FM 7 39 where, following the oracle of the deity Adad, Nur-Sîn shifts to the plural saying that "this is what the prophets said..." (*annītam āpīlū iqbū*). Consequently, ARM 26 199 may also indicate multiple prophetic personnel responding favourably to the king's petition.

3.1.3 Inquiries.

Divine messages could also be solicited by conducting inquiries, possibly through some kind of technical means to aid in the prompting of a prophetic reply. The best example of this can be observed in ARM 26 207, where Šibtu, Zimri-Lim's wife and queen of Mari, reports to having received prophetic "utterances" (*egerrûm*)

¹² Heimpel, *Letters to the King*, 253 n. 238.

¹³ CAD P 127, sub *paqādum*; *ibid.* 391, sub *piqittu*.

¹⁴ On the historical background of this text, see M. Anbar, "'Thou Shalt Make No Covenant With Them' (Exodus 23.32)," in *Politics and Theopolitics in the Bible and Post-biblical Literature*, eds. H. Reventlow, Y. Hoffman and B. Uffenheimer (JSOTSup 171; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 41–42; D. Charpin "Un Traité entre Zimri-Lim de Mari et Ibâl-Pî-El II d'Ešnunna," in *Marchands, Diplomates, et Empereurs: Études sur la civilisation mésopotamienne offertes à Paul Garelli*, eds. D. Charpin and F. Joannès (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1991) 164–65.

in response to several “inquiries” (*šalum*) she made on behalf of the king concerning a forthcoming campaign against his arch-rival Išme-Dagan of Assyria.

ARM 26 207: 3–11.

Concerning the message about the campaign my lord will undertake,
I inquired of a man and a woman by giving them signs to drink.
The oracular utterance for my lord is very favourable.
About Išme-Dagan, I inquired of a man and a woman by the same means.
The oracular utterance for him is unfavourable.

Though *egerrûm* has been usually understood to refer to an adventitious utterance or sound thought to be portentous by its hearer,¹⁵ S. Butler notes that the term’s attestation here clearly demonstrates that it “was by no means overheard by chance, being a ‘direct’ response to a question.”¹⁶ According to Durand, *egerrûm* functions to denote oracular utterances and should be understood as simply reflecting normal “*discours prophétique*” at Mari.¹⁷

The verb *šalum* ordinarily refers to the activity of asking, inquiring, or questioning for the purpose of obtaining various types of information.¹⁸ An example of the kinds of questions which Queen Šibtu had asked, and the oracular utterances she obtained in response, can be found later in the text:

ARM 26 207: 18–21.

I (asked), “Will my lord encounter conflict?
They (replied), “There will be no conflict. For as soon as his (Zimri-Lim’s)
reinforcements arrive, they (Išme-Dagan’s troops) will be scattered...”

¹⁵ F. Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and its Near Eastern Environment: A Socio-Historical Investigation* (JSOTSup 142; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) 160. Cf. A. Oppenheim, “Sumerian: *inim.gar*, Akkadian: *egirrû*, Greek: *kledon*,” *Afo* 17 (1954/56) 49–55. *CAD* E 45, sub *egirrû*. With regards to this particular text, Finet considers the occurrence of *egirrû* to refer to cledonomancy (idem, G. Dossin, *Correspondance Féminine: Transcrite et Traduite* [ARMT 10; Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1978] 252).

¹⁶ S. Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals* (AOAT 258; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998) 155.

¹⁷ Durand, *Archives*, 384–85.

¹⁸ *CAD* Š/1 274–82, sub *šalu*.

That Šibtu proffers a report of having conducted such inquiries on her husband's behalf is hardly surprising given, as Sasson notes, the king's apparent dependence upon her in matters which required divinatory investigation.¹⁹ Yet, if Durand's reading of *aš-qi* at the start of line 6 is correct,²⁰ this attestation of *šâlum* is quite exceptional. That is, rather than referring to either the procedures or results of extispicy as would usually be expected of this verb in divinatory contexts,²¹ inquiries are here accompanied by a procedure apparently unique to Šibtu,²² described as *ittâtîm zikaram u sinništam ašqi* (lit. "the signs, a male and female, I caused to drink).

As to precisely what is meant by the procedure, there is little consensus. The lack of agreement, as Nissinen has noted,²³ is due primarily to divergent opinions on the meaning and function of the term *ittâtum* ("signs") in this phrase. Durand translated the phrase "*j'ai fait boire les 'signes', mâle et femelle,*" understanding that the term "signs" was metonymic for human "sign-givers," permitting both *ittâtîm* and

¹⁹ In addition to a number of other prophetic reports forwarded by Šibtu to her husband (ARM 26 208, 211–14, 236), Sasson notes two letters of Zimri-Lim to his wife, ARM 10 120 and 26 185, which expressly seek her to conduct "divination" (*bārâtum*) and "inquiries" (*šâlum*) on his behalf, respectively (see idem, "Posting of Letters," 307 n. 33, 308).

²⁰ Dossin, the first to collate the tablet, considered the reading to be uncertain and suggested the logogram MAḪ, thus rendering the obv. 5–6 as *zikāram u sinništam maḫḫēm* ("male and female ecstasies") (see idem, *Archives royales de Mari X: La correspondance féminine* [TCL 31; Paris: Geuthner, 1967] pl. 3; idem, *Correspondance Féminine*, 24–25). A. Finet, following his own collation, accepted Dossin's reading (A. Finet, "Un cas de clédonomancie à Mari," in *Zikir Šumim: Assyriological Studies Presented to F. R. Kraus on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, eds. G. van Driel et al. [Leiden: Brill, 1982] 48–55 51–52). Durand, on the other hand, notes that Birot affirmed his reading *aš-qi*, having examined the tablet in Aleppo himself and arriving at the same conclusion (idem, "In Vino Veritas," RA 76 [1982] 43 n. 2).

²¹ When accompanied by references to deities, *šâlum* may denote divinatory inquiries, although in such situations, it usually alludes to the practise of extispicy; see CAD Š/1 278, sub *šâlum*.

²² The only other attestation of *šaḫûm* with *šâlum* occurs in a similarly broken context, ARM 26 212: 1'–2'.

²³ Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 41.

zikaram u sinništam to function together as a single accusative object of *šaqûm*.²⁴

Durand considered this procedure to also be attested in another of Šibtu's letters on the basis of his emendation of the damaged line 2', which he claimed included the signs *aš-qi*:²⁵

ARM 26 212: 1'–2'.

Concerning the message *about* Babylon, I inquired by giving signs to drink.

Sasson regards *ittātim* as magic symbols, functioning together with *zikaram u sinništam* as the double accusative of *šaqûm*, and translating "I gave male and female the signs to drink."²⁶ By this procedure, he suggested, Šibtu was "emulating on earth an activity she herself reported a few months earlier in ARM 26 208."²⁷ Nissinen, who agrees with Wilcke that the verbs *šaqûm* and *šâlum* are asyndetically joined,²⁸ translates "I gave drink to male and female persons to inquire about signs," indicating that he interprets *ittātim* as the direct object of *šâlum* and that *zikaram u sinništam ašqi* represented the means by which such inquiries were conducted.²⁹ Without explanation, however, he shifts from this interpretation in ARM 26 212 where he ambiguously renders *ittātim* somewhere between Sasson and Durand: "I inquired about the matter by giving signs to drink."³⁰ Lastly, Roberts interprets *ittātim* as altogether independent of *šâlum* and suggests it coordinates with *zikaram u*

²⁴ Durand, "In Vino Veritas," 44–45; idem, *Archives*, 436. See also, S. Parker, "Official Attitudes Toward Prophecy at Mari and in Israel," VT 43 (1993) 64; A. Malamat, *Mari and the Bible* (SHCANE 12; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 149.

²⁵ As in ARM 26 207, so also here, Durand translates "*fait boire les signes*" (idem, *Archives*, 441). In contrast, Dossin's original collation of this tablet indicates the start of this line is broken and that these signs are unreadable (idem, *La correspondance féminine*, pl. 4; and *Correspondance Féminine*, 30–31).

²⁶ Sasson, "Posting of Letters," 308.

²⁷ Sasson, "Posting of Letters," 308.

²⁸ C. Wilcke "ittātim ašqi aštāl: Medien in Mari?," RA 77 (1983) 93. Sasson's interpretation suggests he agrees with Wilcke's analysis, although this is never explicitly stated.

²⁹ Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 39.

³⁰ Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 46.

sinništam ašqi as a dependent purpose clause, translating: “(to obtain) oracles I caused a man and a woman to drink, I questioned (them).”³¹ In summary, whilst interpreters differ on the meaning and function of *ittātum* in this text, there is a consensus that inquiries were conducted by means of proffering beverages to human personnel with the purpose of exacting meaningful utterances which, at least in the case of ARM 26 207, were clearly prophetic.

3.1.4 Summary.

In this section it was shown that prophecy could be prompted in several ways at Mari. First, prophetic oracles appear to be closely linked with the performance of sacrifices, occurring together at the same location and on the same day. Syntactical evidence suggests that this link was also causal, such that, prophecy was given in response to sacrifice. Second, oracles acted to divinely “answer” mediated royal requests for reassurance. And third, plying prophetic intermediaries with drinks of some kind seems also to have been an effective way to receive oracular answers in reply to specific enquiries.

3.2 Prophets in the Mari Sources.

3.2.1 Terminology and Function.

Among the personnel who utter divine messages at Mari, two titles occur more frequently than any other and are conventionally rendered as “prophets”: the *muḥḥûm* and the *āpilum*.³² Of these, the *muḥḥûm* (fem. *muḥḥûtum*; pl. *muḥḥû*) is the most frequently attested.³³

³¹ Roberts, “Mari Prophetic Texts,” 186–87.

³² Huffmon makes the important point, that none of these are self-titled as such (with the exception, perhaps, of ARM 26 194), but reflect the perceptions of those whom write the reports (idem, “A Company of Prophets,” 49).

³³ Altogether, there are 33 attestations of the term in 24 texts from Mari. Roughly half of these occur in oracular contexts: *muḥḥûm* (MS) ARM 21 333: 34', 43'; 22 167: 8'; 23 446: 9', 19'; 25 142: 13; 26 202: 15; 206: 5; 215: 15; 220: 16; 221: 9, 19; 221-bis: 12, 20, 27; M.18192: 4; FM 3 2: ii 22'; 3 3: iii 2'; A.4676: 5;

3.2.1.1 The *muḥḥûm*.

The title *muḥḥûm* is generally understood to denote “ecstatic (prophets)”³⁴ on the combined basis that the nominal form is attested alongside *zabbu* (“a type of ecstatic”)³⁵ in Old Babylonian lexical texts³⁶ and is etymologically related to the verb *maḥû*.³⁷ However, whereas the former may tentatively suggest the association of *muḥḥûm* with mantic activity,³⁸ it is unclear if the latter can sustain the view that the *muḥḥûm* “ecstatics” were characterised by some kind of parapsychological condition. Instead, the verb *maḥû* probably indicates an intense state of emotional distress.³⁹ In any case, the absence of any mantic attestations of *maḥû* outside Mari as well as the lack of any explicit portrayal of the ecstatic condition at Mari⁴⁰ means that further precision on what specifically characterises the so-called ecstaticism of the *muḥḥûm* seems practically elusive.

muḥḥû (MP) ARM 26 227: 9; 243: 7, 13; 27 32: 7; FM 3 2: s. iii 3; 152: 5; *muḥḥûtum* (FS) ARM 22 326: 9; 26 200: 5, 21; 201: 9, 15; 237: 22; FM 3 3: iii 6', 8'. Irra-gamil, the “prophet of Nergal” (*muḥḥûm ša Nergal*) who occurs in ARM 21 333: 34' and 23 446: 9', also appears in ARM 26 222, a report of prophecy, as well as the criminal report M.9717; on each of these occasions, without his title.

³⁴ CAD M/1 90–91, sub *maḥḥû*; AHw, *maḥḥû(m)*, 582. Cf. H. Wohl, “The Problem of the *mahhû*,” *JANES* 3 (1970–71) 112–18.

³⁵ For discussion on the ecstatic character of the *zabbu*, see CAD Z 7, sub *zabbu*.

³⁶ MSL 12 5.22: 23–32; 5.32: 26–35.

³⁷ According to W. von Soden, *muḥḥûm* represents a substantive *parrās* form derived from *maḥû* (GAG³ §55 O). Alternatively, Parpola claims that these titles represent Babylonian and Assyrian variants of a D stem verbal adjective (idem, *Assyrian Prophecies*, ciii n. 219).

³⁸ For this claim, see Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVII, CIII n. 222, CIV n. 232; M. Nissinen, “The Socioreligious Role of the Neo-Assyrian Prophets,” in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, ed. M. Nissinen (SBLSymS 13; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 93–95. Stökl dismisses this line of argument, pointing out that *sarrum* (“criminal/liar”) and several other terms unrelated to mantic activity also occur alongside *maḥḥû* in most Old Babylonian recensions of the LÚ series (idem, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 14 n. 61).

³⁹ The term *maḥû(m)* is variously interpreted as “to rave, rage” (AHw, *maḥû*, 586) and “to become frenzied, to go into a trance” (CAD M/1 115–16, sub *maḥû*). See section 3.5.2 for further discussion of this term.

⁴⁰ R. Gordon cites the behaviour of the prophet in ARM 26 206 as an example of ecstatic frenzy (idem, “From Mari to Moses: Prophecy at Mari and in Ancient Israel,” in *Of Prophets' Visions and the Wisdom of Sages: Essays in Honour of R. Norman Whybray on His Seventieth Birthday*, eds. D. Clines, et al. [JSOTSup 162; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993] 69). However, since the verb *maḥû* is absent from the account, it seems speculative to attribute the prophet's extreme actions with only ecstaticism.

3.2.1.2 The *āpilum*.

Altogether, there are 28 attestations of the title *āpilum* (fem. *āpiltum*; pl. *āpilū*) in 19 texts from Mari, the majority occurring in oracular contexts.⁴¹ Like the *muḥḥûm*, the nominal form *āpilum* is also derived from a verb denoting behaviour,⁴² though the two are never attested together. On this basis, *āpilum* is usually understood to denote an “answerer” or “respondent”,⁴³ implying the intermediary could solicit and provide divine answers to human queries. Indeed, as much is initially suggested in the report by Sammetar, the governor of Terqa:

ARM 26 199: 5–16.

Lupahum, *āpilum* of Dagan, arrived from Tuttul. The message with which my lord commissioned him in Saggaratum: “To Dagan of Terqa, entrust me (*piqdanni*)!” This message he conveyed; they answered (*apālum*) him as follows: “Wherever you go, happiness will constantly greet you! Battering ram and seige-tower will be given to you, and they will travel by your side; they will be your companions.” With this message they answered (*apālum*) him in Tuttul.

3.2.1.3 The *nabû*.

Of more immediate interest to the Hebrew prophetic phenomenon has been the identification of a group entitled ^{LÚ}*na-bi-i*^{MEŠ}, a term normalised as *nabû* (pl. “those who are called”) on the understanding that it represents a substantivised passive participle derived from the Akkadian verb *nabû*.⁴⁴ The *nabû* are attested only once at Mari in a letter from the king’s official Tebi-gerišu:

⁴¹ *āpilum* (MS): ARM 9 22: 14; 25 15: 9; 26 194: 2; 195: 5; 199: 5; 208: 6; 219: 5'; 223: 5', 3''; (*āplûm* variant) 209: 6, 15; 371: 9; 414: 29; FM 6 1: 6; 7 38: 3, 17'; 39: 31, 35, 42, 46, 60; A.3796: 4; M.11436: 4; T.82: 3. *āpiltum* (FS) ARM 26 204: 4; FM 7 39: 35. *āpilū* (MP) FM 7 39: 29. The title *āpilum* is also attested in the so-called Epic of Zimri-Lim (See Durand, *Archives*, 393).

⁴² A substantivised G stem participle of the *pāris* pattern denoting a noun of occupation (GAG³ §55 L).

⁴³ CAD A/2 170, sub *āpilu*; AHw, *āpilu*, 58.

⁴⁴ Durand, *Archives*, 377–79, 444–45; idem, “Les prophéties des textes de Mari,” in *Oracles et prophéties dans l’antiquité. Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg 15–17 Juin 1995*, ed. J. Heintz (Paris: de Boccard, 1997) 119–20; Huehnergard, “Etymology and Meaning,” 88*–93*; cf. D. Fleming, “*nābû* and *munabbiātu*: Two New Syrian Religious Personnel,” *JAOS* 113 (1993) 182–83; idem, “The Etymological Origins of the Hebrew *nābî*²: The One Who Invokes God,” *CBQ* 55 (1993) 221; E. Pentiuc, *West Semitic Vocabulary in the Akkadian Texts from Emar* (HSS; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001) 111–13.

ARM 26 216: 1–9.

Speak to my lord: Thus (says) your servant Tebi-gerišu: “On the day after I came to Ašhmad,⁴⁵ I assembled the *nabû* of the Haneans. I had an extispicy performed for the wellbeing of my lord.”

Tebri-gerišu recounts how, out of his concern for the king’s safety during the upcoming rituals for Annunitum, he assembled (*puḥḥur*) a number of Hanean *nabû* and had omens taken (*têrtum šūpušum*). He includes a detailed summary of the binary question he asked and, finally, following a break in the text, ends with cautionary advice to the king, possibly derived from a response that may originally have been included but is now lost.⁴⁶

The function of the *nabû* in this text ultimately pivots upon how one understands their relation to the subsequent clause *têrtam ana šalām bēliya ušēpiš* (lines 8–9). Some consider the Š stem of *epēšum* to be doubly transitive and render the *nabû* as an additional accusative object with *têrtam*, “I made them (i.e. the *nabû*) perform an omen”.⁴⁷ Yet without any pronominal suffix on *epēšum*, explicitly identifying an antecedent, it is not at all certain who (if anyone) conducted extispicy at Tebri-gerišu’s behest. Moreover, the idiom *têrtum epēšum* typically denotes the divinatory practise of examining animal entrails (extispicy) and is the domain of the Mesopotamian haruspex (*bārûm*) not prophets.⁴⁸

Alternatively, others treat the clause as wholly independent from the *nabû* and render *epēšum* as passive, “I assembled the prophets... I had an omen performed.”⁴⁹ Translating thus, Durand claims that Tebri-gerišu is describing a

⁴⁵ Another of Zimri-Lim’s officials often associated with Hanaean affairs (FM 2 52; ARM 26 37; ARM 27 14, 93; cf. Heimpel, *Letters to the King*, 529).

⁴⁶ Durand, *Archives*, 378; cf. Fleming, “Syrian Religious Personnel,” 179.

⁴⁷ Roberts, “Mari Prophetic Texts,” 233; Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 50.

⁴⁸ CAD T 357–67, sub *têrtu*,

⁴⁹ Durand, *Archives*, 445; H. Huffmon, “The Expansion of Prophecy in the Mari Archives: New Texts, New Readings, New Information,” in *Prophecy and Prophets: The Diversity of Contemporary Issues in Scholarship*, ed. Y. Gitay (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997) 14.

“double act” of divination, whereby the *nabû* function alongside *bārû* to prophetically complement extispicy. He points to a similar arrangement with the *āpilû* in FM 7 39 and argues that this is the likely explanation for their occurrence together here.⁵⁰ However, it remains uncertain if FM 7 39 actually mentions extispicy.⁵¹ Without this parallel, and since Tebri-gerišu himself gives no clear indication as to why he “assembled” the *nabû*, their association (if any) with the practise of extispicy is ambiguous and the precise role of the *nabû* in this text admittedly remains obscure.

3.2.1.4 The *assinnu*.

Male personnel identified as *assinnu* (^{LÚ}UR.SAL)⁵² occur in four letters where they are typically associated with divine messages originating from the goddess Annunitum,⁵³ a manifestation of Ištar.⁵⁴ The title *assinnu* in these contexts has been variously translated as “cult homosexual,”⁵⁵ “pederast,”⁵⁶ and “male cultic prostitute,”⁵⁷ all labels reflecting the evidence that they engaged in same-sex sexual activity with other males.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ Durand, *Archives*, 377–79; Fleming, “Etymological Origins,” 219.

⁵¹ Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 20.

⁵² This logogram is a combination of two elements that, according to Nissinen, denotes “man-woman,” wherein UR, which usually is used for *kalbu* (“dog”), represents “masculinity in a despicable sense” (idem, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998] 28, 147 n. 45).

⁵³ ARM 26 197, 198, 212, 213.

⁵⁴ On the identification of Annunitum (Anūnītum) with Ištar in the Old Babylonian period, see W. Lambert, “A Babylonian Prayer to Anūna,” in *DUMU-E2-DUB-BA-A; Studies in Honor of Åke W. Sjöberg*, eds. H. Behrens, D. Loding and M. Roth (Philadelphia: OPKF, 1989) 323–25. Also, A. George, *House Most High: The Temples of Ancient Mesopotamia* (MC 5; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993) 115; P.-A. Beaulieu, *Pantheon of Uruk During the Neo-Babylonian Period* (CM 23; Leiden: Brill-Styx, 2003) 122, 187.

⁵⁵ Roberts, “Mari Prophetic Texts,” 161–162, 188–189, 202–203.

⁵⁶ Heimpel, *Letters to the King*, 251, 259.

⁵⁷ Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (London: Oxford university Press, 1960) 279 n. 11–12.

⁵⁸ Explicit references to *assinnu* engaging in homosexual activity occur in Tablet CIV of *Šumma ālu*, wherein are found omens derived from sexual activities: CT 39 44: 16–17 reads: *assenniš nâk zikarûta ħuššuhšu* (“like an *assinnu*, he desires to have sexual intercourse with men”; for text, see Lambert,

According to Nissinen, however, the homosexual activity of *assinnu* reflects only a minor aspect of their total cultic function.⁵⁹ Together with the *kurgarrû*, another title with whom they are frequently attested,⁶⁰ the *assinnu* were primarily characterised by an androgynous gender role intended to reflect their complete identification with the goddess.⁶¹ Thus, they participated in various rituals and festivals adopting a feminised appearance,⁶² bore cultic paraphernalia usually associated with women,⁶³ and wore masks crafted to imitate Ištar.⁶⁴

Babylonian Wisdom Literature, 279 n. 11–12); CT 39 45: 32 reads: *šumma amēlu ana assinni iṭhi* (“If a man has intercourse with an *assinnu*...”; for text, see *apud* CAD A/2 341, sub *assinnu*. Nissinen claims that suggestive homosexual imagery is implied by Ereškigal’s curse upon the *assinnu* in lines 103–07 of the Assyrian version of Ištar’s Descent to the Underworld (idem, *Homoeroticism*, 33).

⁵⁹ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 28–36.

⁶⁰ These two terms frequently occur together in lexical and ritual texts, see CAD A/2, 341.

⁶¹ For general discussion on the *assinnu*, see: L. Oppenheim, “Mesopotamian Mythology III,” *Or* 19 (1950) 134–146; J. Bottéro and H. Petschow, “Homosexualität,” *RIA* 4: 463–466; S. Maul, “*kurgarrû* und *assinnu* und ihr Stand in der babylonischen Gesellschaft,” in *Außenseiter und Randgruppen: Beiträge zu einer Sozialgeschichte des Alten Orients*, ed. V. Haas (Konstanzer Althistorische Vorträge und Forschungen 32; Konstanz: Xenia, 1992) 159–72; W. Roscoe, “Priests of the Goddess: Gender Transgression in Ancient Religion,” *HR* 35 (1996) 213–217; Parpola, *Archives*, xcvi–xcvii; Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 28–36; CAD A/2 341–342, sub *assinnu*; CAD K 529, sub *kulu’u*; *ibid.* 557–559, sub *kurgarrû*.

⁶² Dressed in female clothing: W. Römer, *Sumerische ‘Königshymnen’ der Isin-Zeit* (DOMA 13; Leiden: Brill, 1965) 130: 45–63a (cf. D. Reisman, “Iddin-Dagan’s Sacred Marriage Hymn,” *JCS* 25 [1973], 187, 194–195); UM 29-16-229 ii 4ff (=Å. Sjöberg, “in-nin šà-gúr₄-ra: A Hymn to the Goddess Inanna by the en-Priestess Enheduanna,” *ZA* 65 [1975] 224). Nissinen mentions that the wearing of makeup by these functionaries (so as to appear feminine) is suggested by the similar name of the stone (*kurgarrānu*) ground for such purposes (cf. Maul, “*kurgarrû* und *assinnu*,” 163).

⁶³ Particularly evident by their use of *pilaqu* (“Spindles”) in SAA 3 4: 10–11; MSL 12 4.212: 215–17; and especially: SAA 2 6 §91 “May all the gods who are called by name in this treaty tablet spin you around like a spindle-whorl, may they make you like a woman before your enemy.” Cf. Bottéro and Petschow, “Homosexualität,” 465.

⁶⁴ *ʾLÚ.KUR.GAR.RA LÚ.UR.SAL ša tillē DN raksu kīma mahṛī ultu ʾšumēli ana imitti ilammūšunūti* (“The *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu* wearing the mask of the [goddess] Narudu dance around them (the deities) from left to right as before...” AO 7439: r. 7–8 in F. Thureau-Dangin, *Rituel accadien* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1921) 115; *LÚ.KUR.GAR.RA rēssu irakkas* (“The *kurgarrû* puts [a mask] on his head,”) in A. Falkenstein, *Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Uruk* (Berlin: Zu beziehen durch die Vorderasiatische Abteilung der Staatlichen Museen 1931) 51; see also, CAD K 558, sub *kurgarrû*.

In addition to physically imitating the feminine amatory qualities of Annunitum, the *assinnu* also sought to embody her martial character.⁶⁵ This is suggested by their ritual brandishing of various weapons⁶⁶ and reenactments of “battle play.”⁶⁷ Consequently, their transgendered appearance and behaviour (including, on occasions, same-sex sexual activity) was actually the embodiment of their absorption into the identity of the goddess, a condition corroborated by the following oracle report in which the *assinnu* Šelibum is introduced only to have the utterance immediately ascribed to the deity:

ARM 26 213: 5–10.

On the third day in the temple of Annunitum, Šelibum became hysterical, “Thus (says) Annunitum: ‘Zimri-Lim, they will test you in a rebellion...’.”

⁶⁵ Lambert sees in the etymology of the goddess’ name a connection with *anuntu/anantu* “battle” (idem, “Babylonian Prayer,” 325). Consonant with this is the image of Annunitum of Sippar as a warrior deity (D. Charpin, “Sippar. Deux villes jumelles,” *RA* 82 [1988] 13–32) and her portrayal in the Epic of Zimri Lim where she is recorded accompanying him into battle (D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand, “La prise de pouvoir par Zimri-Lim,” *MARI* 4 [1985] 328 n. 154; see also Lambert, “Babylonian Prayer,” 324). That the *kurgarrû* and *assinnu* would, in ritual contexts, reenact her presence in battle can be explicitly seen in BM 41005: iii 11–14, 16–17 (W. Lambert, “The Problem of the Love Lyrics,” in *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East*, eds. H. Goedicke and J. Roberts [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975] 104–105) and further demonstrates that these functionaries sought to emulate in every way the total character of the goddess known for her dual attributes of both love and war.

⁶⁶ The neo-Sumerian Hymn of Iddin-Dagan to Inanna records that during a ritual procession the *assinnu* “gird themselves with the sword belt, the ‘arm of battle,’ ...the spear, the ‘arm of battle,’ they grasp in their hands,” and the *kurgarrû* “grasped the sword...” (Römer, “*Königshymnen*,” 130, lines 55, 57, and 74; Reisman, “Sacred Marriage,” 187, 194–195). Likewise, the Poem of Erra describes the *assinnu* and *kurgarrû* as, “the wielders of daggers and razors, vintner’s shears and flint knives”; for text and translations, see: L. Cagni, *L’Epopée di Erra* (Studi Semitici 34; Rome: Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente, 1969) IV 57; idem, *The Poem of Erra* (Sources from the Ancient Near East 1/3; Malibu: Undena Publications, 1977) 52–53; *BM*³, 904.

⁶⁷ *tūšarum mēlulum* in the Babylonian Akitu Festival (SAA 3 37: 29) and *mēlulum qablu*, the latter of which is reminiscent to the description of Ištar from a Neo-Assyrian Hymn of Sargon II “On (her) right and left battle is arrayed. The foremost of the gods, whose play is battle (*mēlulša qablum*)” (see SAA 3 4: 4–5).

3.2.1.5 The *qammatum*.

The title *qammatum* is a title⁶⁸ associated with female intermediaries⁶⁹ and appears in three oracular texts⁷⁰ where it denotes either “a woman who stands, who is of importance,”⁷¹ or, as is more likely, refers to the distinctive hairstyle of those women associated with this title who serve the royal court, possibly as cult prostitutes.⁷²

⁶⁸ Durand, *Archives*, 396. Alternatively, H. Huffmon has consistently championed that ^{MÍ}*qammatum* should, instead, be understood as a personal noun, see idem, “Prophecy in the Mari Letters,” *BA* 31 (1968) 115 n. 23; “The Origins of Prophecy,” in *Magnalia Dei, The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright*, eds. F. Cross, W. Lemke, and P. Miller, Jr. [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976] 173; “Company of Prophets,” 49 n. 8; and “The One and the Many: Prophets and Deities in the Ancient Near East,” in *Propheten in Mari, Assyrien und Israel*, ed. M. Köckert and M. Nissinen [FRLANT 201; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003] 122). He suggests that the attestation of *qammatum* in ARM 26 197, 199, and 203 means that they all may be attributed to the same speaker, along with ARM 26 202, on the basis that the same proverb that is attested in ARM 26 197 and 199 occurs there also. Huffmon’s proposal seems unlikely, however, given that: i) in two of the three texts (ARM 26 197: 6; 199: 42), ^{MÍ}*qammatum* is preceded by the sign DIŠ (f. *īštēt*, “one”) which denotes a numeric designation of amount; and, ii) on both of these occasions *qammatum* is modified by *ša dagan ša terqa*^{KI}. Together, these suggest that ^{MÍ}*qammatum* is best understood as a common noun, despite the presence of the initial MUNUS determinative. Moreover, the oracle recorded in ARM 26 202: 10b–14a is attributed to a male *muḥḥûm*, and, so, cannot be associated with the feminine *qammatum*. More recently, it appears Durand also allows the possibility (idem, “La religión en Siria durante la época de los reinos amorreos según la documentación de Mari,” in P. Mander and J.-M. Durand, *Mitología y religión del Oriente Antiguo*. [Estudios Orientales 8; Sabadell: AUSA, 1995] 333–334, 451).

⁶⁹ The gender of the *qammatum* in ARM 26 203: 12 is unknown as the first signs of the title are damaged.

⁷⁰ ARM 26 197: 6 (with *assinnu*), 199: 42 (with *āpilu*), and 203: 12.

⁷¹ So Dossin in his commentary on ARM 26 197: 6 (idem, *Correspondance Féminine*, 267). As other commentators have noted, however, Dossin derives his interpretation on the basis of קום (“to rise/stand up”) as it appears within the West Semitic prophetic phenomenon, rather than on anything attested at Mari. At Mari, prophets are associated with *tebû* (“to arise/get up”), see 3.4.3.

⁷² Durand makes this suggestion on the basis of the title’s etymological links with *qimmatu* (“hair on the head”) and the verbal form *qamānum* (“to style [hair]”). He points out that *qamānum* is denoted in a lexical text (MSL 5 Hh. II: 284) by the logogram SUHUR.LÁ a verbal equivalent to the nominal form MUNUS.SUHUR.LÁ which is associated with the *kezertum* (Durand, *Archives*, 396). The *kezertum* is an Old Babylonian category of women, possibly cultic prostitutes, who are identified as having curled hair, characteristic of their special status (CAD K 314–15, sub *kezertu*). Further evidence of the link between *qammatum* and *kezertum* comes more directly from another lexical list (MSL 12 5.2: 388–89) where LÚ.SUHUR = *ša qimmatim* and LÚ.SUHUR.LÁ = *kezrum* follow after one another in their masculine forms. More recently, Heimpel has adopted this understanding, translating the title

EXCURSUS: The Disappearing—Reappearing Act of the *qammatum*.

In addition to Durand's re-collation of ARM 26 197 (previously ARM 10 80), his 1988 publication of ARM 26 199 and 203 abruptly laid to rest two decades of scholarly presumption surrounding the term *qammatum* that had built upon an incorrect 'reading' ^M*qa-ba-tum*. It is a story that stands as a cautionary tale on the origins and development of ideas based upon conjecture.

It all began with Moran's questioning of the original collation (ARM 10 80) in favour of his own idea that the second sign could be a "ba" instead of Dossin's "ma." On the basis of this new reading, Moran proposed that the term may be understood as *qabbātum*, and, thus, as with the more common prophetic titles of *muḥḥûm* and *āpilum*, so now this nominal form should also be understood as derived from a verbal root (*qabûm*) with the meaning "a (professional) speaker."⁷³

However, Moran was only speculating and he intended his proposal to be understood as tentative. As much can be seen by his framing the entire idea as a question as well as the clear lack of prominence he gives to the idea in his article. Despite this, the idea was immediately accepted by Johannes Renger⁷⁴ and subsequently adopted by both dictionaries of Akkadian.⁷⁵ That Moran's 'reading' became the dominant understanding of the *qammatum* is reflected in its unquestioned reiteration over the next twenty years. Only Dossin, the text's original editor, was an unsurprising exception in this period. Though apparently aware his original collation ran counter to the subsequent strong tide of scholarship, even he did not explicitly contradict Moran's alternate reading, admitting it only to be "forced."⁷⁶

At its peak, *qabbātum* was employed as yet another of the comparativist's evidences to Mari's "West semitic tribal heritage" and its prophetic phenomenon as the "forerunner" of biblical prophecy. Malamat, the most assertive of these, suggested to link *qabbātum* to קבב ("to curse"), a Hebrew term frequently associated with the mantic activity of Balaam (*passim* between Num 22:11 and 24:10).⁷⁷ Malamat argued for this link by wildly supposing that קבה was the etymological origin of קבב, rather than נקב.⁷⁸ That Malamat apparently did so, in an attempt to more closely approximate the Akkadian term (itself unsubstantiated), leaves one bewildered by the apparent blurred boundaries between scholarship and invention.

Durand's re-collation, however, confirmed Dossin's original reading of the second sign as "ma" and not "ba."⁷⁹ Similarly, the publication of ARM 26 199 and 203 also corroborate this, the second of which occurs with the full spelling of the

qammatum as "shock-head" which he suspects refers to the "unkempt" state of their hair (Heimpel, *Letters to the King*, 252).

⁷³ Moran, "New Evidence," 53.

⁷⁴ J. Renger, "Untersuchungen zum Priestertum der altbabylonischen Zeit. 2. Teil (Schluß)," ZA 59 (1969) 104–230.

⁷⁵ AHW, *qabbātum*, 886; CAD Q 2, sub *qabbātu*.

⁷⁶ Dossin, *Correspondance Féminine*, 267.

⁷⁷ A. Malamat, "A Forerunner of Biblical Prophecy: The Mari Documents," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, eds. P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson and S. D. McBride (Philadelphia: 1987) 38.

⁷⁸ HALOT, קבב, 1060.

⁷⁹ Durand, *Archives*, 396, 424.

geminated second consonant *m* ([^{mi}qa]-am-ma-[tim] ARM 26 203:12). Since then, there has been a complete shift in scholarship to return to the original suggestions of Dossin and those prior to Moran, to interpret what is implied by this title.

3.2.1.6 Untitled prophets.

In addition to personnel with professional titles, several letters attest so-called “lay prophets,” that is, personnel that utter divine messages yet who lack a title and so, arguably, have no particular status in the cult. In one letter, a woman identified as “Ahatum, a servant girl of Dagan-Malik” utters a divine message of the goddess Annunitum.⁸⁰ In another, an oracle is spoken on behalf of Dagan by an unnamed “woman, the wife of a (free) man.”⁸¹ Two letters provide no information at all beyond a brief reference to the gender of the intermediaries.⁸² Finally, it should be noted that Šelibum, an *assinnu* of the temple of Annunitum, is twice attested without being identified by his title.⁸³

3.2.2 Prophets and Gender.

Whilst a clear majority of attestations refer to divine messages delivered by male intermediaries, it should not be concluded that female prophets maintained only a peripheral role. Indeed, all but one of the so-called “lay prophets” are identified as being female,⁸⁴ as are the *qammatum*. It should also be remembered that the *assinnu* were male in gender only, whereas they typically adopted a feminised appearance and behaviour (inc. sexual acts) in their pursuit to identify

⁸⁰ ARM 26 214: 6.

⁸¹ ARM 26 210: 8.

⁸² ARM 26 207: 5; 217: 27. Although due to the loss of the first ten lines of text, the phrase *sinništum* šī (“this woman”) in the latter could, in fact, be referring back to an earlier identification which was more explicit but is now lost.

⁸³ ARM 26 198: 3’ and 213: 6. The latter attests *assinnu* only after recording the oracle in the letter’s epilogue.

⁸⁴ ARM 26 207: 5, 9. Although even here, the unnamed *zikārum* are accompanied by *sinništum*.

themselves with their goddess Annunitum. Interestingly, Annunitum is also associated with almost all attestations of the *muḥḥūtum*.⁸⁵

Especially worthy of note is the apparent correlation between a prophet's gender and the gender of the correspondent in whose letter they are attested.⁸⁶ Indeed, among the overall volume of letters reporting prophecy, male correspondents outnumber females by more than two to one. Remarkably, however, where female prophets (inc. the *assinnu*) are attested the pattern is completely reversed. This suggests not only that the activity of female prophets was disproportionately reported by female correspondents, but also there was a closer association between them.

3.2.3 Individuals and Groups.

For the most part, Mari prophets occur in the sources as individuals, although plural forms are also attested. Queen Šibtu claims to have solicited and received oracles from unspecified *zikārum* and *sinništum* ("male[s]" and "female[s]"),⁸⁷ the plural of which is indicated by the subsequent insertion of *umma šunūma* to introduce their direct speech as well as plural verb forms (i.e. *idabbabū* and *imtaḥḥšū*) to describe their activities. According to Nur-Sîn, multiple *āpilū* were together responsible for the lengthy utterance of Adad of Kallassu that he includes at the beginning of his report.⁸⁸ Elsewhere, an unknown official recounts to Zimri-Lim that an undetermined number of *muḥḥūm* had repeatedly delivered the same

⁸⁵ The exception is M.5529 (unpub.) of which Durand comments "Elles ne se définissent pas par rapport à un temple ou un dieu" (idem, "La religion Amorrite," 423).

⁸⁶ Sasson ("Posting of Letters," 304–8) alludes to this correlation for the purpose of demonstrating a relationship between the female elite of Mari and the sentiments they communicated to the king through various divinatory means.

⁸⁷ ARM 26 207: 5, 9.

⁸⁸ FM 7 39: 13–30. Note also the plural form *iqbū* accompanying the *āpilū* in line 29, making explicit the collaborative nature of the divine message.

instruction of Dagan to demolish an abandoned building.⁸⁹ Finally, groups of *muhḥû* and *muhḥâtum* both participate in various rituals of Ištar.⁹⁰ All of this demonstrates that, in addition to individually delivering divine utterances, prophets (and prophetesses) could also function in groups and were known to be collectively active.⁹¹

3.2.4 Prophets as “Messengers.”

By functioning to deliver divine messages to the king, Mari prophets ultimately bore the status of being messengers of the deity. According to Durand, the messenger status of prophets is initially implied by the attested practice of giving payment and rewards to prophets, commensurate to *mār šiprum*, following their utterance of divine messages.⁹² In addition to this, on several occasions the prophets themselves claim that the deity had “sent” (*šapārum*) them in order that they may dictate a divine message to be “sent” to the king.⁹³ More explicit references to the messenger status of the prophets occur in two decrees of expenditures, where prophets are identified as among the *awīlī ša šiprī* (“people who are messengers”) who received recompense from the palace coffers.⁹⁴ Finally, an administrative tablet recently published by Durand describes a prophet by the otherwise unattested title: *šukkalum ša^d Dagan* (“messenger of the god Dagan”).⁹⁵

3.2.5 Summary.

The sources indicate that a number of different personnel were prophetically active at Mari, with *muhḥûm* and *āpilum* the most frequently attested titles. Among

⁸⁹ ARM 26 243: 7–8, 13–14.

⁹⁰ FM 3 2: s. ii 1–3; 3: iii 8’.

⁹¹ Several other letters report groups of prophets in broken contexts: (*nabû*) ARM 26 216: 7; (*muhḥû*) 27 32: 7–8; FM 3 152: 5.

⁹² Durand, *Archives*, 380–81.

⁹³ ARM 26 210: 11–12; 220: 19–20; 221: 13–15.

⁹⁴ ARM 25 142: 12–17; A.4676: 4–7.

⁹⁵ M.18192: 4–5. For text, see Durand, “Un habit pour un oracle!” 233.

these, male prophets are attested more than twice as often as their female counterparts overall, though the image is significantly nuanced by the greater concentration of female and feminized prophets in those sources written by female correspondents. For the most part, prophet(esse)s seem to have been individually active, uttering their divine messages alone and unaccompanied. Nevertheless, occasional attestations of plural forms in letters and ritual texts suggest that they could also be collectively active and deliver oracles in groups. Ultimately, prophets functioned as messengers of the deity, for which they were recognised and duly recompensed.

3.3 Prophetic Deities in the Mari Sources.

3.3.1 The Prophetic Deities.

There is a wide variety of deities associated with prophecy at Mari. Dagan, and, especially, his manifestation at Terqa, is the most frequently attested, with almost a third of all sources referring to his oracles or prophets.⁹⁶ Other gods and goddesses of lesser frequency include: Marduk,⁹⁷ Ea,⁹⁸ Šamaš,⁹⁹ Diritum,¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Dagan of Terqa: ARM 26 196: 5'; 197: 6–7; 199: 8, 42; 202: 7; 210: 11; 220: 17, 19; 221: 9; 223: 4''; 243: 7, 13. Dagan of Tuttul: ARM 26 199: 15; 209: 6; 215: 15. Dagan of Šubatūm: T.82: ix 3–4. Unspecified Dagan: ARM 25 15: 9; 26 205: 7'; 206: 5; FM 6 1: 5, 10 (for restoration see Charpin, "Prophètes et rois," 34); M.11436: 3–4; M.18192: 4–5.

⁹⁷ ARM 26 371: 9.

⁹⁸ In ARM 26 208: 10'–21', Ea dialogues with other deities regarding a potential rebellion against Zimri-Lim's rule. Due to a sizeable lacuna at the end of the obverse, however, the exact context of the discourse is not clear.

⁹⁹ ARM 26 194: 2–4, 32; 414: 29–30, 32.

¹⁰⁰ ARM 26 208: 5–6; 199: 29–40 appears to record an oracular answer given by the deity Diritum to Lupahum, an *āpilum* of Dagan (Parker, "Official Attitudes," 54–60, 63; Sasson, "Water Beneath Straw," 600–03; M. Nissinen, "Das kritische Potential in der altorientalischen Prophetie," in *Propheten in Mari, Assyrien und Israel*, eds. M. Köckert and M. Nissinen [FRLANT 201; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003] 27–28).

Annunitum,¹⁰¹ Belet-ekallim,¹⁰² Ninhursag,¹⁰³ Hišamitum,¹⁰⁴ Nergal,¹⁰⁵ and the West-Semitic deities Adad¹⁰⁶ and Hanat.¹⁰⁷

3.3.2 Prophetic Deities and the Sender's Location.

At first glance, the disproportionate number of oracles and prophets associated with Dagan seems to imply that, in addition to his prominence within the divine pantheon,¹⁰⁸ Dagan was also the *majordomo* of Mari prophecy. However, comparison between the deities and the letters in which they occur suggests otherwise. Almost all of the attestations of Dagan occur in letters which were sent to Mari by officials from Terqa, a provincial capital that was a well-established center for Dagan worship.¹⁰⁹ The same also holds true for most of the other deities,

¹⁰¹ ARM 22 326: 8–10; 26 212: 5–6, 13'; 213: 5, 7; 214: 5; possibly also the oracle spoken by Šelebum in ARM 26 198: 5'–14' as well as the two oracles in ARM 26 200: 7–20 on the basis that Ahum, the letter's author, is the *šangûm* priest of Annunitum.

¹⁰² ARM 26 209: 15 and—if Durand's restoration is to be accepted—211: 7 (idem, *Archives*, 440).

¹⁰³ ARM 22 167: 8'; 26 219: 4'–5'; A.4676: 4–6.

¹⁰⁴ ARM 26 195: 5. On this goddess see I. Nakata, "Deities in the Mari Texts: Complete Inventory of all the Information on the Deities Found in the Published Old Babylonian Cuneiform Texts from Mari and Analytical and Comparative Evaluation Thereof with regard to the Official and Popular Pantheons of Mari" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1974) 210–211; J. Sasson, "The Calendar and Festivals of Mari During the Reign of Zimri-Lim," in *Studies in Honor of Tom B. Jones*, eds. M. Powell Jr. and R. Sack (AOAT 203; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1979) 132.

¹⁰⁵ ARM 21 333: 34'; 23 446: 9'. According to Charpin and Durand, "Amu of Ḫubšalum" in ARM 27 32: 7 refers to a local manifestation of Nergal (idem, "La prise de pouvoir par Zimri-Lim," *MARI* 4 [1985] 333).

¹⁰⁶ ARM 25 142: 13; FM 3 152: 5. FM 7 39 attributes two oracles to this deity, the first to "Adad, lord of Kallassu" (lines 13–28) and another to "Adad, lord of Aleppo" (lines 46–59). A second text, FM 7 38, should also be attributed to his manifestation at Aleppo.

¹⁰⁷ Embedded in the speech of the male deity Yakrub-El, the goddess Hanat is quoted as part of a dialogue between several deities (ARM 26 196: 13'–14'). For this goddess, see Nakata, "Deities in the Mari Texts," 198–203; J. Sasson, "Mari Apocalypticism Revisited," in *Immigration and Emigration within the Ancient Near East: Festschrift E. Lipinski*, eds. K. Van Lerberghe and A. Schoors (OLA 65; Leuven: Peeters, 1995) 290–91.

¹⁰⁸ On the deity Dagan in the Mari sources, see Nakata, "Deities in the Mari Texts," 111–51; Durand, *Le Culte*, 1–14.

¹⁰⁹ É.KI.SI.GA (*bīt qūltišu*), the temple of Dagan at Terqa, was built by Šamši-Adad I (RIMA 1 A.0.39.8). Notably, the only exception to this (ARM 26 197: 6–20) is, in fact, an attestation which proves the

whose important centres of devotion largely correspond to the locations of the senders in whose letters they and their utterances are attested.¹¹⁰ Thus, in view of the correlation that exists between the deities and the origins of the letters in which they appear, it is hardly surprising that, given more prophetic sources were sent from Terqa than anywhere else, Dagan is attested more frequently than any other deity.

The correlation between the deities and the locations of the letters also highlights something about the character of the prophetic deities. It suggests that, despite the broad purview of their divine messages,¹¹¹ the deities themselves were largely active only within the limited vicinity of their own cult centres. Indeed, even purported exceptions to this rule still serve to affirm their parochial image, indicating that the deities were far from being omnipresent, and could only utter oracles addressed to different locales by dispatching their prophets to physically go there and deliver them.¹¹²

rule. According to Inib-Šina, the king's sister in Mari, a *qammatum* of Dagan of Terqa had not only delivered a divine message, but had travelled (*alākum*) to her in order to do so.

¹¹⁰ The attestations of Annunitum all occur in sources sent from Mari, wherein, it has been suggested (Moran "New Evidence," 32; Nakata, "Deities in the Mari Texts," 79), there resided two temples dedicated to the goddess. In FM 7 38 and 39, Oracles attributed to Adad come exclusively from Yamhad in the West, the locus of the deity's cult. A prophet who speaks for Marduk is reported in a letter from Babylon (ARM 26 371), while a letter from Qaṭṭunan (ARM 27 32) mentions a prophet of "Amu of Ḫubsalum," a manifestation of Nergal known locally in adjacent Yamutbal (Charpin and Durand, "La prise," 333). In ARM 26 199, Lupaḫum, a prophet from Terqa, receives a divine message from Diritum when travels to Dir.

¹¹¹ See 3.6 below.

¹¹² In addition to the *qammatum* of Dagan of Terqa mentioned above (ARM 26 197), FM 7 38 and 39 records prophets who travelled (*alākum*) to Kallassu to deliver oracles of Adad of Aleppo. Similarly, in ARM 26 208, Šibtu records the delivery of an oracle of Diritum at the palace gate in Mari by a prophet who had come there (*alākum*), presumably, from Dir. Finally, ARM 26 199 reports on the prophet Lupaḫum who delivers the prophecies of various deities as he travels through Tuttul from Saggaratum to Terqa and Dir.

3.3.3 Summary.

In this section it has been shown that there are numerous deities associated with prophets or divine messages in the Mari sources and that, whilst some are attested more frequently than others, prophecy is not the prerogative of any particular deity or their localised manifestations. Indeed, among the various letters received by the palace at Mari, a close correlation appears to exist between the deities and the locations from where the letters were sent. The significance of this is it explains how the disproportionate number of oracles spoken by Annunitum and, especially, Dagan, are a result of the disproportionate number of letters received from officials who report prophecy in Mari and Terqa, respectively. Moreover, it also suggests that, despite the sometimes broad purview of their messages, the deities and their intermediaries were largely parochial in their activity.

3.4 Location of Prophecy.

3.4.1 Capitals Across the Fertile Crescent.

The pantheon of deities attested within the Mari corpus highlights the variety of locales associated with prophecy and how widespread across the fertile crescent the phenomenon was at the time.¹¹³ That prophetic activity was not limited to the city of Mari is a point made explicit in one of the earliest identified sources:

FM 7 39: 34–43.

Formerly when I lived in Mari, I reported to my lord whatever word a prophet (*āpilum*) or prophetess (*āpiltum*) said to me. Now that I am living in another country shall I not write to my lord what I hear and what they say to me? If in the future any loss occurred, would not my lord say, “Why did you not write to me the word which the prophet (*āpilum*) said to you when he was demanding your area?”

¹¹³ In addition to the Mari sources, the image of prophecy being a widespread phenomenon during the Old Babylonian period is further enhanced by the small, though not insignificant, number of texts retrieved from alternative sites elsewhere in the fertile crescent. See section 2.2.

Indicating Zimri-Lim's historical and continued political connections with the region, oracles were sent from the cult centres of Adad in the regional capital of Aleppo (Ḥalab) and Kallassu in the far west.¹¹⁴ In the north, prophetic activity was reported at Qattunan,¹¹⁵ a district capital on the Habur river, and neighboring Andarig, the royal city and capital of Yamutbal.¹¹⁶ Prophecies and prophetic activity were also reported in the powerful southern cities of Sippar and Babylon.¹¹⁷ The majority of prophetic oracles recovered, however, seem to have been generated along the mid Euphrates, the district capitals Terqa (T. Ašara) and Tuttul (T. Bi'a) as the two foremost centres for the cult of Dagan during this period have already been mentioned.¹¹⁸ Coinciding with their place of provenance, the capital of Mari itself accounts for almost a quarter of all the prophetic texts identified thus far.¹¹⁹ The importance of Annunitum at Mari and the reverence with which her followers were held there is vividly evidenced in the volume of oracles attributed to her.¹²⁰

3.4.2 Mari Satellites.

That prophetic oracles and their intermediaries were not only limited to the regional capitals but could also emerge from satellite locales in their vicinity is evident in several letters. ARM 26 199 provides a particularly interesting example. In his letter to the king, Sammetar narrates how Lupahum, an *āpilum* of Dagan, was originally charged at Saggaratum with the task of seeking an oracle on the king's behalf from Dagan of Terqa. In the same letter, Lupahum is also reported to have

¹¹⁴ FM 7 38 and 39. The exact whereabouts of Kallassu is unknown. On the basis of FM 7 39, it is generally accepted to be located close by Aleppo. See J. Klengel, "Der Wettergott von Halab," *JCS* 19 (1965) 87–93; Malamat, "Prophetic Revelations," 210, n. 2; Moran, "New Evidence," 20; Nakata, "Deities in the Mari Texts," 24, n. 22; Durand, *Le Culte d'Addu*, 60–61.

¹¹⁵ ARM 27 32 and, possibly, ARM 26 216 (see Sasson, "Posting of Letters," 310–11).

¹¹⁶ ARM 26 414; associated with Tell Khoshi, see Heimpel, *Letters to the King*, 606.

¹¹⁷ From Sippar: ARM 26 194; at Babylon: ARM 26 371.

¹¹⁸ For Terqa, see *OEANE* 5: 188–90; Tuttul, see Malamat, "Prophetic Revelations," 216.

¹¹⁹ ARM 26 197, 198, 200, 204, 207, 211–214, 219, 222, 238.

¹²⁰ See 3.3.1 above.

accompanied Sammetar onto Dir where he had successfully solicited an oracle from the patron goddess Diritum. Further evidence for prophetic activity from both Saggaratum and Dir can also be seen in ARM 26 206 and 208, respectively.

3.4.3 Temple Venues.

It appears that the usual venue for the delivery of prophetic oracles was within the context of temples. That this was generally assumed of the phenomenon may be seen in the following royal instruction quoted by Šamaš-našir, an official at Terqa:

ARM 26 196: 5–12.

When my lord (i.e. king Zimri-Lim) decided to go on campaign, he instructed me as follows, Thus (saying): “You are dwelling in the city of god (ie Terqa). Write to me of whatever oracle there is in the temple of god that you hear.” Since that day I have heard nothing in the temple...

Moreover, a number of the Mari letters themselves make explicit reference to temples as the place of prophetic activity:

	<i>ina bīt DN... PN maḥû</i>		<i>umma</i> ¹²¹
	<i>ina bīt DN... PN maḥû-ma</i>	<i>kām iqbi</i>	<i>ummāmi</i> ¹²²
prophet	<i>ina bīt DN...</i>	<i>tebûm</i>	<i>ummāmi</i> ¹²³
	<i>ina bīt DN prophet</i>	<i>tebûm kām idbub</i>	<i>ummāmi</i> ¹²⁴
<i>wu²³urtaša</i>	<i>ina bīt DN...</i>	<i>nadānum</i> ¹²⁵	
prophetess	<i>ina bīt DN</i>	<i>tebûm</i>	<i>ummāmi</i> ¹²⁶

The last of these references is particularly striking. The letter in which it occurs also includes the report of a dream wherein divine direct speech is apparently uttered

¹²¹ ARM 26 213: 5–7.

¹²² ARM 26 214: 5–8.

¹²³ ARM 26 195: 5–7.

¹²⁴ ARM 26 219: 4’–6’.

¹²⁵ ARM 26 199: 52–54.

¹²⁶ ARM 26 237: 22–23.

inside the vicinity of Belet-ekallim's temple.¹²⁷ This suggests that, even within the context of dreams, cult centres act as the venue for oracles.

The temple venue is also implied in several ways. Ellermeier had suggested that where a report makes reference to a sacrifice, which presumably was offered in a temple, the prophet may be presumed to have been active alongside.¹²⁸ On this basis, he suggested a temple venue for ARM 26 209 and 215, both of which associate prophetic activity with the performance of "offerings (*nīqam*) to Dagan." Admittedly speculative at the time,¹²⁹ the evidence of ARM 26 219, published two decades later, provides a solid link between temple-centred cult offerings and temple-based prophecy. The relevant lines are as follows:

ARM 26 219: 4'-6'.

On the day of the sacrifice in the temple of Ninhursag, a prophet of Ninhursag arose and spoke as follows...

The importance of this text is not so easily exhausted and these lines contain another integral feature of temple-based prophetic activity that clarifies the phenomenon further. The delivery of the divine oracle is prefaced by *tebûm* ("to arise, get up"). It may be noted that *tebûm* occurs in both of the above texts¹³⁰ and, more significantly, it also occurs alongside references to the temple in several other of the aforementioned texts.¹³¹ Consequently, where the action of an intermediary is described in a report by *tebûm*, it seems reasonable to conclude that temple-based prophetic activity is implied. Additionally then, FM 6 1 and ARM 26 204, each of

¹²⁷ ARM 26 237: 8-21.

¹²⁸ Ellermeier, *Prophetie in Mari*, 80.

¹²⁹ Ellermeier (idem, *Prophetie*, 80) admits that the temple, as venue for prophecy, can be identified only "with difficulty."

¹³⁰ ARM 26 209: 7, 16; ARM 26 215: 16. The latter, notably locates the intermediary's *tebû* action as happening *pān* ("before") Dagan, arguably, a reference to the deity's image in the temple. A similar motif also occurs in FM 7 39: 13-14, 29-30, see Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 20.

¹³¹ See ARM 26 195 and 237 above.

which preface the quotation of the divine oracle with *tebûm*, can also be considered as having occurred there.

Finally, it seems plausible that, where reports of prophetic activity are provided—or are claimed to have been provided—by cultic functionaries, the temple venue may also be inferred. In the case of Inib-Šina, the sister of Zimri-Lim and a *waqqurtum* (“High Priestess”) of Adad,¹³² this has already been confirmed for ARM 26 214 by the use of *tebûm* in line 5. In another of her reports, Inib-Šina’s addition of the ventive nuances her description of the intermediaries’ actions and implies that they had each brought themselves into her physical presence to deliver oracles; she says:

ARM 26 197: 4–5, 6–9.

Previously, Šelebum, the *assinnu*, gave to me an oracle... Now a *qammatum* of Dagan of Terqa came to me, and spoke to me as follows: Thus she (said): “The peacemaking of the man of

That Inib-Šina’s “presence” should be located in the context of the cult centre, is confirmed in a corresponding report by Sammetar the governor of Terqa. He states:

ARM 26 199: 42–43, 52–54.

...a *qammatum* of Dagan of Terqa came to me, and spoke to me as follows: Thus (she said): “Beneath the straw water runs...” Then she delivered her charge to Inib-Šina in the temple of Belet-ekallim.

The certainty that her audience with the *qammatum* took place in the temple, in addition to the morphological continuity in the intermediaries’ actions, suggests that her interaction with Šelebum was conducted there as well.¹³³

¹³² J.-M. Durand, *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari*. Vol. 3. (LAPO 17; Paris: Cerf, 2000) 402.

¹³³ Similarly, the damaged report of an oracle attributed to Šelebum (ARM 26 198) may also have its origins in a cultic context. On the identification of ARM 26 198 as a report of Inib-Šina, corresponding to her initial comments in ARM 26 197: 4–5, see Durand, *Archives*, 425. Cf. Parker, “Official Attitudes,” 54 n. 15.

Aḥum, the *šangûm* (“priest”) of the Annunitum temple, is another cultic functionary whose accounts of prophetic activity can be linked to the temple.¹³⁴ Queen Šibtu herself makes this connection in her report to her husband (ARM 26 214). Acknowledging Aḥum as the source of her report, she associates the oracle of a servant girl with the temple of Annunitum, accordingly.

3.4.4 Non-Temple Venues.

Whereas all of this shows that prophecy was certainly at home in the temple, nevertheless, a number of letters indicate that it wasn’t restricted to them either. Indeed, ARM 26 206 describes a very public display of prophetic activity in the vicinity of the city gate:¹³⁵

ARM 26 206: 5–18, 28–34.

A prophet of Dagan came and spoke. Thus he (said): “Indeed what shall I devour that belongs to Zimri-Lim? Give one lamb that I may devour (it).” I gave him one lamb, and in front of the city gate (*abullum*) he ate it alive! He assembled the elders in front of the city gate (*abullum*) of Saggaratum, and he spoke. Thus he (said): “A devouring will take place...”

...Now, the oracle which he spoke to me, I wrote down, and I have sent (it) to my lord. He did not tell me his oracle in secret, but he gave his oracle in the assembly of the elders.

That this venue was far from unique is evidenced by two other reports of prophetic oracles delivered before the palace gates of Zimri-Lim, Hammurabi, and, the king of Ekallatum, Išme-Dagan, while he was exiled in Babylon:

ARM 26 208: 5–8.

Speak to my lord: Thus queen Šibtu (says): “On the second day, Qišti-Diritum, a prophet (*āpilum*) of Diritum, came to the gate of the palace (*bāb ekallim*) and sent to me (a message) as follows: Thus (he said)...”

¹³⁴ ARM 26 200, 201.

¹³⁵ Contrasting opinions remain as to whether this letter refers to a city gate at Saggaratum (Durand, *Archives*, 435) or Terqa (Van der Toorn, “Between the Oral and the Written,” 62 n. 43). However, these identifications are largely inconsequential to the point that the text itself clearly reports an instance of prophetic activity outside the vicinity of the temple.

ARM 26 371: 9–12, 15–22, 31–33.

A prophet (*āpilum*) of Marduk stood before the gate of the palace (*pān bāb ekallim*)¹³⁶ and incessantly shouted out loud (Gtn *šasûm*). Thus he (said): “Išme-Dagan will not escape from the hand of Marduk...”

...These things he incessantly shouted aloud at the gate of the palace (*bāb ekallim*), and no one said anything to him.

In the same way he stood before them at the gate of Išme-Dagan (*bāb PN*) and in the assembly of the whole land he incessantly shouted out loud. Thus (he said): “To make peace and friendship you went to the ruler of Elam...”

...These things he kept crying out in the assembly of the whole land. No one spoke to him.

3.4.5 Summary.

The Mari sources present prophecy as a widespread phenomenon throughout the fertile crescent—a point confirmed further by the small, though highly significant, number of materials retrieved from various sites that also attest to the presence and activity of prophets. From this survey of the evidence, it can be seen that prophecy was not limited merely to capitals, the centres of cult and culture, but is also attested among regional satellites as well. The socio-religious location for prophetic activity was usually to be found in the temple, although various non-temple locations are also attested. The latter includes the city gates—a very public location—as well as outside the gates of the royal palace.

3.5 Prophetic Means for Delivering Oracles.

There are two aspects of the prophetic phenomenon at Mari that will be discussed in this section. The first is the means by which oracles were initially received by prophets from their purported divine source. The second is the means by which oracles were subsequently transmitted by prophets to an audience. The former is associated with *prophetic revelation*, while the latter has to do with the

¹³⁶ Nissinen (*Prophets and Prophecy*, 74) comments that *bāb ekallim* here refers to the palace of Hammurabi, the king of Babylon.

prophetic event. We begin our discussion by addressing how prophets communicated oracles.

3.5.1 Oracles Spoken.

It is widely acknowledged that the delivery of oracles in the ancient Near East was an oral phenomenon, and, so, it seems hardly worth mentioning that prophecy at Mari was no exception to this. Yet, to associate the phenomenon merely with orality not only oversimplifies the image of prophecy described in the Mari texts, more importantly, it overlooks a number of other behaviours which occur alongside oral performance, or, in some examples, may even occur without it.

Before discussing the oral phenomenon at Mari, it is helpful to first address what is meant by “orality”. The oral delivery of oracles at Mari is associated with verbs that elsewhere, in non-prophetic contexts, describe the common act of spoken communication. In the prophetic texts, by far the most frequently attested term to describe the speaking of an oracle is *qabûm* (“to say”).¹³⁷ Other terms attested include its synonym *dabābum* (“to speak/tell”)¹³⁸ and verbs reflecting particular kinds of spoken activity: *šasûm* (“to shout/call out”),¹³⁹ *apālum* (“to answer/respond”).¹⁴⁰

Evidence for the oral delivery of oracles at Mari can initially be found in three texts which refer to the hearing (*šemûm*) of oracles, audibly communicated, by intermediaries who spoke them:

FM 7 39: 34–39.

Previously... I reported to my lord whatever word that the prophets and prophetesses said to me. Now... would I not inform my lord what I have heard and (what) they have told me?

¹³⁷ *Passim* in letters reporting oracles.

¹³⁸ ARM 26 199: 40, 55; 204: 5; 206: 29; 207: 36–38; 217: 27; 219: 6', 22'; 243: 8, 14.

¹³⁹ ARM 26 202: 16; 371: 10, 16, 20, 32.

¹⁴⁰ ARM 26 199: 10, 16; 237: 26 (deity).

ARM 26 196: 8–10.

Inform me of any oracle which occurs in the deity's temple and that you hear.

ARM 26 202: 7–9.

I heard the words that were spoken in the temple of Dagan.

These texts portray oracles as audible, that is, they could be heard and the prophets were their speakers.

Descriptions of the actual oral delivery are commonly found in the introductory and postscript sections. As we saw in the previous chapter, Mari prophetic texts introduce the prophetic event as follows:

Subject (i.e. the prophet) (+ Location) + Verb(s) + Speech Particle + Direct Speech.

For example:

ARM 26 243: 7–10.

The prophets of Dagan are constantly telling me, "The deity cursed the bricks of that house..."

Unlike in this example, verbs of speaking rarely occur alone. Instead, they are usually paired with a preceding verb of action. As is attested in the following text:

FM 7 38: 3–6.

Abiya the prophet of Adad, lord of Aleppo, came to me and said to me as follows: "Thus (says) Adad, 'I gave the whole country...'"

The range of action verbs which accompanies the oral delivery of oracles to describe the prophetic event is surprisingly limited to just four: *alākum* (usually occurs with ventive, "to come");¹⁴¹ *tebûm* ("to arise");¹⁴² *uzuzzum* ("to stand");¹⁴³ *maḥûm* ("to go

¹⁴¹ ARM 26 197: 8; 198: 3'; 199: 43; 206: 6; 208: 7; 210: 8; 221bis: 13; 414: 30; FM 7 38: 4; 39: 47.

¹⁴² ARM 26 195: 7; 204: 5; 209: 7, 16; 215: 16; 219: 17'; 237: 23; FM 6 1: 6.

¹⁴³ ARM 26 211: 8; 371: 10, 19; FM 7 39: 14, 30 (deity).

into a frenzy”).¹⁴⁴ Each of these nuance the oral image of the prophetic event differently, and will be addressed in more detail below.

In regards to the portrayal of orality within the postscript of the report, reference is usually made to an intermediary’s spoken act as follows:

Object (“This”)¹⁴⁵ + Subject (Prophet)¹⁴⁶ (+ Context)¹⁴⁷ + Verb of Speaking.

For example:

ARM 26 243: 13–14.

This is what¹⁴⁸ the prophets of Dagan told me.

Just as with ARM 26 243, so it is also observable in many other letters, that references to the oral delivery of oracles appear in the introductory and postscript sections. Where this occurs, the speaking verbs in both sections are almost invariably identical terms. This repetition suggests that, in addition to recounting an oral event, such details may also have functioned in the letter as a literary device to bracket the direct speech episode that appears between them. The only exception to this appears on two occasions in ARM 26 199. Yet even here, the verb *qabûm* in the introductory section merely shifts to its equivalent, *dabābum*, effectively proving the rule.¹⁴⁹

A final piece of evidence for the oral character of the prophetic event is perhaps the most obvious of all, that is, the inclusion of the prophet’s speech. In the

¹⁴⁴ ARM 26 213: 7; 214: 7; 222: 6, 13; FM 3 2: ii 23’, 26’. For discussion of this verb, see 3.5.2.

¹⁴⁵ The accusative is the near demonstrative *annītam/annētim* which refers to the antecedent oracle proper. In ARM 26 199: 15 and 40, the demonstrative is *annēm* which is preceded by *ṭēmum* (i.e. “this message”).

¹⁴⁶ In several texts, the subject appears only in the inflected form of the verb (e.g.: ARM 26 197; 199: 16, 55; 206; 239; 371; 414).

¹⁴⁷ This syntagm refers to either a human (ARM 26 371: 31; FM 7 39: 61) or locational (ARM 26 233: 40; 371: 15) context. In ARM 26 198 it refers to a brief statement of means: *ana pî*.

¹⁴⁸ With the antecedent being the oracle proper (lines 9–12).

¹⁴⁹ Compare lines 29 and 40; 43 and 55.

reporting of prophecy, the direct speech of the prophet typically follows the author's initial description of the episode and is immediately preceded by the quotative particle *ummāmi*.¹⁵⁰ Arranged thus, subsequent direct speech is presented as a quotation, and, its antecedent subject—the prophet—is its speaker. In a number of cases, this is made explicit by the use of *ummāmi/umma* + Independent Pronoun.¹⁵¹ Where the gender of the deity is at odds with that of the independent pronoun, the prophet as speaker is especially clear.¹⁵²

There is, however, a handful of texts which lack a preceding quotative particle, and, thus, fail to formally mark subsequent direct speech as the quoted speech of a prophetic speaker. Such texts form two categories: 1) first person texts;¹⁵³ and 2) texts that include *umma/ummāmi* + DN (“thus [says] DN”).¹⁵⁴ The former, unsurprisingly lack a quotative particle on the basis that, being autobiographical, it is largely unnecessary for the prophetic author to indicate they are quoting themselves.¹⁵⁵

The second category, however, is not so easily explained. One view takes the phrase *umma/ummāmi* + DN (“thus [says] DN”) as the words of the author and the abrupt shift from describing the prophet to quoting divine speech as a kind of descriptive technique. According to this explanation, the author describes the circumstances in which two identities (human and divine) become so inseparable

¹⁵⁰ ARM 26 195, 199 (3x), 200 (2x), 202, 204, 208, 209 (2x), 210, 214, 220, 221, 221bis, 223, 233, 235, 237, 238, 240, 243, 371, 414, 229; FM 6 1; 7 39.

¹⁵¹ *ummāmi* + Indp. Pn.: ARM 26 215, 219, 236; *umma* + Indp. Pn.: ARM 26 206, 207, 211, 221bis, 227, 371.

¹⁵² ARM 26 197: 6–10; 198: 3'–4'; 222: 12–14 (Irra-gamil, a *muḥḥum*, is associated with the goddess Nergal in ARM 23 446 and 21 33); ARM 26 219 with *ummāni* + *šūma* should also be mentioned here.

¹⁵³ ARM 26 194, 232, 237, 239, 240.

¹⁵⁴ FM 7 38; ARM 26 208, 213, 234, and (poss.) 223. In these texts, the introduction of the prophetic speaker shifts immediately to *umma/ummāni* + DN without any preceding speech particle to indicate a quote of the human intermediary.

¹⁵⁵ After the appearance of the particle in the text's opening address, prior to the divine speech episode, what follows remains written in the first person anyway, making redundant the repetition of the particle. See ARM 26 240 for a notable exception.

that the prophet, in effect, *becomes* the “mouthpiece of the deity” whose person is, at that moment, divinely possessed.¹⁵⁶ While this appeals to the idea of prophecy as “ecstaticism,” nevertheless, textual evidence is lacking.¹⁵⁷

Alternatively, the phrase *umma/ummāmi* + DN may be understood as the quoted direct speech of the prophet which is formally unmarked. Such is the case in ARM 26 194, where, being a first person account, direct speech is associated with the speech of the prophet by default. Moreover, in this text, the prophet himself employs a quotative particle to signal that he is now quoting the deity:

ARM 26 194: 1–3.

Speak to Zimri-Lim: Thus (says) the prophet of Šamaš: “Thus (says) Šamaš: ‘I am the lord of the land...’.”

Use of the quotative particle by the prophet is also quite certain in several other texts where it similarly functions to signal the prophet’s quotation of divine speech.¹⁵⁸ In one of these, the prophet’s use of the quotative is itself embedded in a more extensive unit that is marked by the author:

FM 7 39: 46–49.

A prophet of Adad, lord of Aleppo, came with Abu-ḫalim and he (i.e. the prophet) said the following, thus: “Write to your lord!, thus (Adad says): ‘Am I not Adad, lord of Aleppo?’.”

In this example, the quotative particle *ummāmi* occurs twice. The first occurrence, Nur-Sîn signals that what follows is a quotation of the “prophet of Adad.” The second is embedded in this latter context, as the quotation of the prophet’s speech. That a double occurrence of the quotative particle occurs in this example, but not in

¹⁵⁶ Moran, “New Evidence,” 26–27. Likewise, Nissinen refers to “divine inspiration” (idem, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 80).

¹⁵⁷ A point acknowledged even by those who espouse an “ecstatic” explanation. For example, see, Moran, “New Evidence,” 27; R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 103. See the next section below for discussion on ecstaticism and Mari prophecy.

¹⁵⁸ ARM 26 205, 232, 233, 238, 239; FM 7 39.

texts which only have *umma/ummāmi* + DN, might be explained on the basis that in FM 7 39, and others like it, the prophet's personal comments are extended, in some cases even self-referential, before they relay the speech of the deity. Conversely, texts which simply have *umma/ummāmi* + DN and lack this double occurrence of the quotative particle, thereby failing to explicitly mark the phrase as the quoted speech of the prophet, may simply be due to the sense of redundancy that occurs when attested together in such close proximity.

3.5.2 Oracles Performed.

It was mentioned above that prophets are rarely described as speakers only, rather, their oral performance of oracles is often paired with a verb of action. Verbs of action function in several ways. In most cases, the prophet's actions signal the physical location of where the prophet communicated the oracle. As already discussed, *tebûm* implies that the divine oracle was spoken in the context of the temple; *alākum* denotes that prophets came, in person, into the presence of either the cult functionary or palace official to deliver it verbally; and finally, *uzuzzum* is attested where it describes a prophet located away from the temple, in the midst of the city.¹⁵⁹

Accompanying divine oracles, a prophet's actions can themselves also communicate a message, albeit symbolically. In one letter an unidentified prophet performs a symbolic act before his assembled audience, its portentous meaning, he explains, represents the potential catastrophic consequences for failure to carry out his instructions:

ARM 26 206: 5–18.

A prophet of Dagan came and he spoke as follows, thus he (said): “Verily, what shall I eat that belongs to Zimri-Lim? Give *me* a lamb that I may eat!” So, I gave him a lamb and, while it was still living, he devoured it in front of the city gate. Moreover, he

¹⁵⁹ See earlier section 3.4.

assembled the elders in front of the city gate of Saggaratim, and he said as follows, thus he (said): “A devouring will take place...”

The significance of the prophet’s act and its direct relationship to his pronouncement is clearly not lost on the letter’s author. He describes the prophet’s ravenous behaviour with the term *akālum* (“to eat”), a word etymologically and semantically related to the prophet’s quoted threat of *ukultu* (literally a “devouring”).¹⁶⁰ The author conceptually links the divine message to the prophet’s actions and indicates how the “consuming” of the raw lamb communicates a clear portent for the potential outbreak of a “consuming” disease or infestation among both humans and livestock if the prophet’s instructions are not heeded.

Verbs of action can also function to indicate the prophet’s psycho-behavioural appearance at the time of their oral performance. If Durand’s restoration of line 14 in ARM 26 221bis is to be accepted,¹⁶¹ Kibri-Dagan, the letter’s author, describes the visibly disturbed comport of an unnamed prophet by using the Durative Gt form of *ašāšum*, which may be translated as “to be distraught, to be in continual distress.”¹⁶² This highly agitated state further explains the author’s evaluation of the prophet’s “threatening” (*dannātum*) oracles which, like his counterpart in ARM 26 206, appears to portend “catastrophic” (*kurullum*) consequences for failing to obey them.¹⁶³

It may be recalled that *maḥûm* has already been briefly mentioned on account of its etymological relationship with the prophetic title *muḥḥûm*.¹⁶⁴ The verb *maḥûm*

¹⁶⁰ CAD U-W 64–65, sub *ukultu*. See also Charpin, “Le contexte historique,” 22; J. Heintz, “La ‘fin’ des prophètes bibliques? Nouvelles théories et documents sémitiques anciens,” in *Oracles et prophéties dans l’antiquité. Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg 15–17 Juin 1995*, ed. J. Heintz (Paris: de Bocard, 1997) 209–10; Van der Toorn, “Between the Oral and the Written,” 62–63.

¹⁶¹ Durand, *Archives*, 450–51. Nissinen (*Prophets and Prophecy*, 57) notes that Durand’s restoration of the Gt form, is unique among the Mari corpus, where Gtn forms are more frequently attested. Cf. ARM 1 5: 21; 2 69: 9, 15; 26 350: 18.

¹⁶² CAD A/2 424, sub *ašāšum*.

¹⁶³ ARM 26 221bis: 23–26.

¹⁶⁴ See section 3.2.1.1.

(N stem) is attested six times at Mari,¹⁶⁵ on each occasion being accompanied by a prophetic speaker as its subject, and is variously rendered: “to prophesy/vaticinate”,¹⁶⁶ “to (go into a) trance”,¹⁶⁷ “to (become) ecstatic”,¹⁶⁸ “to (go into a) frenzy/rage”.¹⁶⁹ Scholars since Langdon have considered *maḥûm* in these contexts as a kind of prophetic *terminus technicus* to denote a parapsychological mode of divine revelation, wherein the human subject receives an oracle from the deity by entering a state of altered consciousness, possibly through divine possession.¹⁷⁰ However, such an understanding is largely unsubstantiated.

First, in all of its attestations at Mari, *maḥûm* has no connection with deities, and, so, it seems unlikely that the term should refer to a divine act of any kind, not least the deity’s revelation to—or possession of—a human recipient. Second, the relation of *maḥûm* to the receiving or speaking of oracles is highly uncertain.¹⁷¹ Indeed, the addition of *kīam qabûm* in ARM 26 214 effectively separates *maḥûm* from the subsequent quotation of divine speech¹⁷² and only *a priori* assumptions about its mantic character justify interpreting any relationship between them as a verbal hendiadys. Third, with the dubious exception of FM 3 2,¹⁷³ there are no indications

¹⁶⁵ ARM 213: 7; 214: 7; 222: 6, 13; FM 3 2: ii 23’, 26’.

¹⁶⁶ Dossin, *Correspondance Féminine*, 31, 33; Durand, *Archives*, 442; Durand and Guichard, “Les Rituels,” 58; Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 81.

¹⁶⁷ Moran, “New Evidence,” 29–31; CAD M/1 90, sub *maḥḥû*; *ibid.* 115–16, sub *maḥûm*; Durand, *Archives*, 387, 451; Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 47, 58. Intriguingly, Roberts nuances his translation and renders it as “ecstatic trance” (idem, “Mari Prophetic Texts,” 191–93).

¹⁶⁸ G. Dossin, “Un rituel du culte d’Ištar,” *RA* 35 (1938) 10; “Sur le prophetisme,” 82; Huffmon, “Mari Letters,” 111–14; Heimpel, *Letters to the King*, 260.

¹⁶⁹ AHW, *maḥû*, 586; Ellermeier, *Prophetie in Mari*, 57, 61; Nissinen, “Socioreligious Role,” 92.

¹⁷⁰ S. Langdon, “Philological Note: Maḥḥû, not Magus,” *JRAS* (1932) 391–92; Ellermeier, *Prophetie in Mari*, 92; Moran, “New Evidence,” 26–28; Durand, *Archives*, 386–88; Nissinen, “Socioreligious Role,” 92.

¹⁷¹ Contra the claim of Nissinen that *maḥû* can “introduce direct speech” (idem, “Socioreligious Role,” 93).

¹⁷² A syntactical feature common throughout the Mari letters reporting prophecy, examples include: ARM 26 197: 8–10; 198: 3’–4’; 204: 5; 206: 6–7; 208: 7–8; FM 6 1: 6–9; 7 38: 4; 39: 47.

¹⁷³ It is unclear what, if anything, can be gleaned from the uncertain relationship between *maḥûm* in FM 3 2: ii 23’ and Durand’s restoration of *šaqaḷum* in the previous line. Durand attempts to interpret

that a state of altered consciousness was necessary or even practised by prophets, whereas the sober coherence of the oracles themselves seem to argue against it.¹⁷⁴ Finally, it is worth also mentioning that Langdon's original "Philological Note," upon which subsequent parapsychological understandings of *maḥûm* in the Mari prophetic contexts have largely been based, is itself problematic. Langdon relied upon a purported Sumerian lexical link with *waṣûm* ("to go out")¹⁷⁵ to infer the term's association with altered consciousness.¹⁷⁶ However, upon re-inspection the significance of the link is wholly untenable.¹⁷⁷

Alternatively, the meaning of *maḥûm* at Mari is probably best understood consistent with the term's attestations elsewhere, in non-mantic contexts, where it

šaḡālum as referring to "dans une phase d'équilibre," by which he actually means a moment of reason in contrast to *maḥûm* which he understands is "déséquilibre mental" (idem, *Archives*, 387). However, such an interpretation is ultimately unsuccessful as it relies upon the presupposition that *maḥûm* relates to the prophet's state of consciousness, of which there is no unambiguous evidence.

¹⁷⁴ A feature already acknowledged by Malamat ("Prophetic Revelations," 211), Moran ("New Evidence," 27–28). Alternatively, Grabbe considers this to be a moot point and suggests that the apparent articulacy of the prophets was due to a couple of factors, including, the light mode of the prophet's trance and the secondary nature of the Mari materials (idem, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel* [Trinity Press: Valley Forge; 1995] 87–118). However, Grabbe's suggestions face significant problems. The first relies on an argument from silence, which is ultimately unverifiable without the questionable practice of appealing to external socio-anthropological models to fill the gaps. Second, notwithstanding the likelihood that scribes were involved in the prophetic process, acting to record and transmit spoken oracles, there is at least one text which appears to originate with the prophet himself (ARM 26 194) while in another the prophet's choice of vocabulary invokes an intentional word-play commensurate with his symbolic actions (ARM 26 206), both of which cast doubt on Grabbe's assertion as it relates to the phenomenon at Mari.

¹⁷⁵ Although not cited, the attestations to which Langdon referred are probably to be found in the Middle Assyrian lexical text Diri I, where *waṣû* and *maḥû* are both listed under E.UD.DU (MSL 15.3.1.2: 149, 158).

¹⁷⁶ Langdon suggests the translation: "the mind goes forth" (idem, "Maḥḥû, not Magus," 391–92).

¹⁷⁷ Besides *waṣû*, *maḥû* occurs alongside several other terms as well, including *maḥāḥu* ("to soak/dissolve in liquid") and *napāḥu* ("to blow, light up"), none of which appear to have any clear relevance to altered consciousness or mantic activity (see MSL 15.3.1.2: 149–61).

denotes an intense state of distress.¹⁷⁸ Thus, according to the letters of Šibtu and Ušareš-ḫetil the prophetic speakers may have appeared to their audiences to have been especially agitated; perhaps because their oracles announced *bārtum* (“revolt/rebellion”) as well as the death of the king’s daughter—hardly emotionless topics—although one cannot completely be sure of the actual reason for their hysterical appearance.

3.5.3 Oracles Written.

So far, discussion has focused upon the communication of oracles by a prophet to an audience as predominantly an oral phenomenon. Though limited, there also is evidence which suggests that some prophets had their oracles committed to writing, preferring to transmit them in textual form rather than by oral performance. Yasim-El, an official of Mari stationed in Andarig,¹⁷⁹ reports to Zimri-Lim of a visit from Atamrum, a prophet of Šamaš, who appears to have this means of communicating an oracle in mind:

ARM 26 414: 29–42.

Another matter: Atamrum, the prophet of Šamaš, came to me and spoke the following to me, thus (he said): “Dispatch to me a discrete scribe that I may have him write the message which Šamaš has sent me for the king.” This (is what) he spoke to me. (So) I dispatched Utu-kam. He wrote this tablet. This man appointed witnesses and spoke the following to me, thus (he said): “Transmit this tablet quickly that he may act according to the tablet.” This (is what) he spoke to me. Now I have transmitted this tablet to my lord.

In the same manner as many of the Mari prophetic texts, Yasim-El introduces his report by narrating how the prophet “came” (*alākum*) and “spoke” (*qabûm*) to him. Yet, rather than continuing with the prophet’s oral delivery of the oracle, what follows is an assertive request from the prophet for a “competent” and/or

¹⁷⁸ For example, see: SBP VI: 6 *ālu immaḥḥû ina lallarāti* (“the city is hysterical with lamentation”); TDP 134: 34 (dupl. 178: 14) *takalti libbišu ikkalšu u libbašu maḥû* (“his stomach hurt him and his insides are in spasm”); BWL 38: 21 *ana ša imḥû belšu imšû* (“like one who is hysterical and forgotten his lord”).

¹⁷⁹ For letters associated with this official, see ARM 26 402–42 and possibly A.285.

“discrete” scribe, a description which has been interpreted with either the scribe’s writing ability or capacity for secrecy.¹⁸⁰ Whatever the particular aptitude of the scribe sought, from the remainder of Atamrum’s words, it is clear that he was seeking someone to render the oracle, which he had received from Šamaš, into a written form.¹⁸¹ The oracle of Šamaš, upon being transcribed, was to be transmitted to the king and acted upon.

Whilst not as explicit as ARM 26 414, two reports of Šibtu to the king imply that oracles were delivered to her, not orally, but also in textual form:

ARM 26 208: 5–8.

On the second day, Qišti-Diritim, a prophet of Diritum, came to the gate of the palace and sent to me (a message) as follows, thus (he said)...

ARM 26 212: 5–11.

Ili-Haznaya, the prophet of Annunitum, came to me in the midst of the temple of Annunitum..., and he sent to my lord a message concerning Babylon, thus (he said)...

In each case, Šibtu narrates how prophets “came” (*alākum*) and “sent” (*šapārum*) messages which were divine oracles for the king. In the first example, the text makes fairly clear that the queen had not met with Qišti-Diritim who merely arrived “at the gate of the palace” from whence he sent his message. That there is no reference to an oral delivery in either example suggests that we are dealing here

¹⁸⁰ The adjective *našrum* has been variously translated. Durand, the text’s editor, originally translates this term as “très compétent” (D. Charpin et al., *Archives épistolaires de Mari I/2* [ARM 26/2; Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988] 295) and “très soigné” (Durand, *Archives*, 391), in both cases suggesting that Atamrum was seeking a competent scribe. Charpin, holding that ARM 26 194 is the oracle text being referred to in ARM 26 414, later rejects his earlier interpretation and argues that *našrum* ought to reflect a sense wherein the prophet had sought a scribe who would keep the contents of the written oracle a secret (idem, “Le contexte historique,” 31 n. 18). Malamat (*Mari and the Bible*, 129) seeks to encompass both of these meanings. Finally, Durand later nuances his translation by suggesting that, on the basis of the appearance of witnesses in this and parallel texts, *našrum* should be understood in terms of the secure delivery of the tablet (idem, *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari*. Vol. 2 [LAPO 17; Paris: Cerf, 1998] 254).

¹⁸¹ ARM 26 414: 32–33 *ṭēmam ša Šamši ana šarri išpuranni lušašter* (“...that I may have him write the message which Šamaš has sent me for the king”).

with oracles that had already been committed to writing and subsequently transmitted to Queen Šibtu on behalf of her husband.

3.5.4 Prophetic Revelation.

Whereas descriptions of the various means by which Mari prophets communicated oracles to their audiences are abundant, information on the divine transmission of oracles to prophets is almost completely absent among the letters.¹⁸² According to ARM 26 205, the speaker, possibly a prophet, claims that the god Dagan had “informed” (š *aḥāzum*) him of an oracle. No specific means are indicated by this term, though the subsequent occurrence of the quotative particle may imply that the deity had originally transmitted the divine message orally.¹⁸³ The same *ummāmi* + DN construction also occurs in a number of other letters,¹⁸⁴ in one of which the deity summons his audience to “hear” (š *emûm*) his divine instructions.¹⁸⁵ Explicit references to divine speaking only occur embedded within a couple of oracles,¹⁸⁶ the contents of which indicate that the deities are speaking (i.e. *qabûm*) not so much to the prophet, who apparently can “overhear” (š *emûm*),¹⁸⁷ but amongst themselves in the context of the divine council.

3.5.5 Summary.

In this section it was shown that the primary means by which prophets transmitted divine messages to their intended audiences was through audible

¹⁸² It was noted earlier that *maḥûm* is not relevant to this discussion as the term does not refer to divine action nor does it denote the purported parapsychological state of the prophet. See section 3.5.2.

¹⁸³ Cf. Heimpel who translates “Dagan let me grasp (its meaning...),” suggesting the receipt of the message through the divinely assisted mental contemplation of the speaker (*idem*, *Letters to the King*, 256).

¹⁸⁴ ARM 26 194: 3, 32; 213: 7; 223: 4’; FM 7 38: 5. See also FM 7 39: 14 where *ummāmi* occurs without a divine name.

¹⁸⁵ FM 7 38: 6’.

¹⁸⁶ ARM 26 196: 6’, 12’; 208: 8’, 11’, 22’.

¹⁸⁷ ARM 26 208: 10’.

spoken communication. Various actions often accompany their pronouncements, the most frequently attested of which indicate the prophetic venue and include *tebûm*, *uzuzzum*, and *alākum*. Occasionally, actions may also indicate the psycho-behavioural condition of the prophet at the time of their pronouncement or even function to symbolically illustrate the oracular message. Besides speaking, there are also indications that the prophets would commit divine oracles to writing and transmit them in textual form. There is relatively little information on the means by which deities communicated their messages to the prophets.

3.6 Prophetic Messages in the Mari Sources.

The Mari prophetic oracles address the affairs of the kings Zimri-Lim and his Assyrian predecessor Yasmaḥ-Addu.¹⁸⁸ Through oracles, the deities affirm the king of his divine election, reassure him of their divine support, and remind him of his divine obligations—three themes which, when taken together, form a comprehensive “theology of kingship.”¹⁸⁹ Each aspect will be addressed in further detail below.

3.6.1 Divine Investiture of the King.

Several deities refer to Zimri-Lim’s royal investiture in terms of their divine involvement in his preparation, appointment, and equipping to the kingship of Mari. In separate oracles reported in FM 7 39, Adad of Aleppo and his counterpart in Kallassu both claim to have divinely “raised” (D *rabû*) Zimri-Lim on their “lap” (*ina*

¹⁸⁸ For the identification of the letters FM 6 1 and ARM 26 223 with the reign of Yasmaḥ-Addu, see Charpin, “Prophètes et rois,” 33–38.

¹⁸⁹ On this phrase, see more recently the comparative study of royal ideologies between Israel and the ancient Near East in B. Levinson, “The Reconceptualization of Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History’s Transformation of Torah,” *VT* 51 (2001) 511–34.

suḫātum/birit paḫallum),¹⁹⁰ “restored” (D *târum*) him to his “ancestral throne” (*kussê m bīt abī*), and—in the case of Adad of Kallassu—had also provided him with his current “place of residence” (*ašrum šubtum*).¹⁹¹ Echoing this, in FM 7 38 Adad of Aleppo not only reminds Zimri-Lim that he had divinely restored the king to the throne of Mari, but that it was he who “anointed” him (*šamnam pašāšum*), and provided him with invincible “weapons” (*kakkum*)—even as the deity had previously done for his father, Yaḥdun-Lim.¹⁹²

On each of these occasions, reference to the deity’s involvement in the king’s investiture is closely followed by divine threats, demands, or both¹⁹³—a feature which indicates that such claims functioned not so much to reassure Zimri-Lim, but to intimidate him. A comparable situation occurs in the royal correspondence where reference to Zimri-Lim’s investiture by foreign counterparts is closely accompanied by political ultimatum.¹⁹⁴ According to Sasson, such references are used alongside kinship terminology as metaphor for political allegiance,¹⁹⁵ yet, it could be added, that they also served to emphasize the political obligations expected between unequal parties.¹⁹⁶ In any case, reference to third-party involvement in the king’s investiture was clearly not comforting, as all of these

¹⁹⁰ Along these lines, in ARM 26 217: 14–15 an (unknown) deity makes a similar claim: “Since your childhood I have taken care of you, I always look after you where it is safe” (*ištu šuḫrika ukānakka-ma u ēm šalmātim attanabbalka*).

¹⁹¹ FM 7 39: 14–19, 49–51.

¹⁹² FM 7 38: 5–7, 1’–4’. On the identification of Yaḥdun-Lim with Ḫadni-Addu, the father of Zimri-Lim, see the discussion of J. Sasson, “Thoughts of Zimri-Lim,” *BA* 47 (1984) 115–16; “The King and I: A Mari King in Changing Perceptions,” *JAOS* 118 (1998) 457–59.

¹⁹³ FM 7 38: 5–10, 6’–17’; 39: 19–23, 52–55.

¹⁹⁴ See lines iii 28–37 in Ibal-Piel’s letter to Zimri-Lim (A.1289+) in D. Charpin, “Un Traité,” 148–57. Conversely, for an example from an inferior to his superior, see Zimri-Lim’s letter to Yarim-Lim ARM 28 16.

¹⁹⁵ For an initial discussion on the use of kinship terminology and political metaphor in these letters, see Sasson, “The King and I,” 462–464.

¹⁹⁶ Note the various demands and duties outlined in each letter and the clear expectation there was for the superior party (i.e. the “father”) to show benevolence even as the inferior party (i.e. the “son”) was to remain loyal in his allegiance.

examples show. Rather, it may be recognized as a rhetorical device readily used to coerce the king into fulfilling his duties of fidelity to his patron, both divine or human—something to which we shall return later.

3.6.2 Divine Support Against the King's Enemies.

Almost all of those with whom Mari had encountered at least some conflict during the reign of Zimri-Lim are represented in the oracle corpus, including: the Yamina, Ešnunna, Ekallatum, Elam, Kurdâ, and Babylon.¹⁹⁷ In a number of oracles, deities refer to adversaries according to the land or tribal group to which they belonged.¹⁹⁸ Just as often, oracles also identify them explicitly by name,¹⁹⁹ and, perhaps, by royal title as well.²⁰⁰ On occasion it appears the deities simply cannot resist using the diminutive title “man of GN” (*awîl GN*),²⁰¹ and, so, divulge their contempt toward those who oppose Zimri-Lim, their king.

More frequently, however, the deities are not so explicit but employ generic “disorder”²⁰² vocabulary when referring to Mari's opponents. They are called “enemies” (*ayyābu*),²⁰³ “foes” (*nakrum*),²⁰⁴ “ill-wishers” (*ḥaddānu*),²⁰⁵ “rivals” (*māḥīrum*),²⁰⁶ and “thieves” (*šarrāqum*).²⁰⁷ Occasionally, they are represented by

¹⁹⁷ For a reconstruction of the background history and the military conflicts during the reign of Zimri-Lim, see Heimpel, *Letters to the King*, 37–163.

¹⁹⁸ ARM 26 197: 11; 199: 25, 31, 33, 35; 200: 12, 18; 208: 13; 209: 8; 371: 22, 25.

¹⁹⁹ ARM 26 194: 33; 207: 8, 14, 25, 28, 40; 209: 18; 212: 11; 371: 11.

²⁰⁰ ARM 26 194: 8, 33; 210: 15–16.

²⁰¹ ARM 26 197: 11; 199: 25, 31; 208: 13; 212: 3', 5'. Note also ARM 26 202: 13 “the people, his enemies” (*awîlê ayyābîšu*) probably a reference to Ibal-Piel and the delegates from Ešnunna.

²⁰² Common to Assyrian, Hittite and Egyptian conquest accounts in Royal Inscriptions, see K. Younger, Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (JSOTSup 98; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990) 73, 132–33.

²⁰³ ARM 26 202: 13; 204: 8.

²⁰⁴ ARM 26 198: 10'; 214: 12; 217: 24.

²⁰⁵ ARM 26 211: 13.

²⁰⁶ FM 7 38: 7.

²⁰⁷ ARM 26 204:

poetic metaphors, such as the “confusion” (*ešitum*)²⁰⁸ and “darkness” (*du³umu*) which “falls on the Lower land,”²⁰⁹ or are alluded to by the use of literary motifs, like the Yamina who are described as “a wind” (*šārum*) which will “rise against the land” (*ana mātim itebbēm*)²¹⁰ and whose “wing” (*kappu*)²¹¹ the deity shall “test” (*šālum*).²¹² Finally, they are also commonly referred to by descriptions of their offenses and hostilities. In the oracles, adversaries are described as those who “incessantly spread negative and erroneous reports about you” (*ittika lā damqātim u lemnētim awilū bēl awātika ušteneššū*),²¹³ “people who steal” (*awil šarrāqum*),²¹⁴ “cause worry” (*palāsum*),²¹⁵ “scheme against the land (of Mari) unsuccessfully” (*mādātim ana mātim annitum ušām ul ikaššad*),²¹⁶ “people who commit acts of violence” (*awil ša rīam ippušu*),²¹⁷ “who test (Zimri-Lim) in a revolt” (*ina bārtim latākum*),²¹⁸ “those who circle (Mari’s) borders” (*ša itātum saḥārum*),²¹⁹ “who oppose (the king) and repeatedly attack (Mari)” (*ša ana panim izuzzum u saḥāṭum*),²²⁰ who are duplicitous,²²¹ and impudent.²²²

²⁰⁸ Durand, *Archives*, 433.

²⁰⁹ ARM 26 205: 5’–6’. Charpin interprets this metaphor to denote Larsa (idem, “Prophètes et rois,” 29).

²¹⁰ For examples where *šārum* occurs with *tabûm* to express hostile opposition, see CAD Š/2 135, sub *šāru*; cf. *AHW*, *šāru* III, 1193.

²¹¹ Parpola suggests that the mention of *kappum* in this oracle refers to the breaking of the Southwind’s wings in the myth of Adapa (idem, *Assyrian Prophecies*, CV n. 246); cf. S. Izre’el, *Adapa and the South Wind: Language Has the Power of Life and Death* (MC 10; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001) 16–19. Alternatively, in view of Yamina’s attempt to “cause fear” (*D palāḥu* in line 19), it may also be an allusion to the deity Ningursu’s defeat of Anzu as recorded in Tablet II (lines 109–12, 131–36) of the Epic of Anzu; see, A. Annus, *The Standard Babylonian Epic of Anzu* (SAACT 3; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001) 25.

²¹² ARM 26 200: 7–10.

²¹³ ARM 26 195: 8–15.

²¹⁴ ARM 26 214: 15.

²¹⁵ ARM 26 200: 19.

²¹⁶ ARM 26 212: 3’–4’.

²¹⁷ ARM 26 206: 21. Following the translation of *rīšu* in Durand, *Archives*, 434..

²¹⁸ ARM 26 213: 8–9, 20.

²¹⁹ ARM 26 204: 8–9.

²²⁰ ARM 26 194: 8–9.

In response to such threats the deities usually claim that they will accomplish “concrete results of victory”²²³ against all who dare to oppose the king. They pledge to “trample” (*kabāsum*),²²⁴ “drive away” (*tarādum*),²²⁵ “expel” (*š wašûm*),²²⁶ “extinguish” (*gamārum*),²²⁷ “capture” (*šabātum*), take “prisoner” (*asīrum*),²²⁸ “control” (*kašāšum*), prevent from “escape” (*ul wašûm*),²²⁹ “bind and crush as a sheath” (*šaḥarrum kašārum u ḥabāšum*),²³⁰ “gather into chains” (*ana šakarim paḥārum*),²³¹ “ensnare in a net” (*ana šētim kamāsum*),²³² “detain for destruction by Belet-ekallim” (*ana karāš Bēlet-ekallim kamasum*),²³³ pass “judgment” (*šiptam nadānum*),²³⁴ force to “submit” (*kanāšum*),²³⁵ and “call to account” (*šālum*).²³⁶ In a couple of oracles, deities even vow to exact “exemplary punishment”²³⁷ upon the king’s enemies that include:

²²¹ On the attestations of the phrase “beneath straw water runs” (*šapal tibnim mû illakû*; ARM 26 197: 13–14; 199: 44; 202: 10–11), see Sasson, “Water Beneath Straw,” 599–608. Note also the “deceitful talk” of Hammurabi, king of Kurda: ARM 194: 34–35.

²²² ARM 26 371.

²²³ Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 75.

²²⁴ ARM 26 195: 15–16.

²²⁵ ARM 26 199: 37.

²²⁶ ARM 26 206: 22.

²²⁷ ARM 26 199: 37.

²²⁸ ARM 26 207: 41.

²²⁹ ARM 26 371: 12.

²³⁰ ARM 26 371: 12–14.

²³¹ ARM 26 209: 9–10.

²³² ARM 26 197: 14–16.

²³³ ARM 26 214: 17–18. For this translation of *karāš*, see Roberts, *Prophetic Texts*, 193; Heimpel, *Letters to the King*, 260. Cf. Durand who understands it as the bound form of the noun *karāšum* and translates it as “(military) camp” (idem, *Archives*, 443).

²³⁴ ARM 26 196: 3’.

²³⁵ ARM 26 194: 10.

²³⁶ ARM 26 200: 10.

²³⁷ Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 76–77.

“beheading” (*qaqqadam nakāsum*)²³⁸ his adversaries and “piling up” (*kamārum*)²³⁹ “burial heaps” (*gurnatum*)²⁴⁰ of their corpses following their defeat.

The role of king, in contrast, is often presented as largely passive while the deities act to intervene on his behalf and without his involvement. According to ARM 26 207, when asked if Zimri-Lim “will draw near to battle” (*ana kakki iṭeḥḥe*), the deity responds that “a battle will not be fought” (*kakku ul inneppešu*) by the king. Instead, the “auxiliaries” (*tillatum*)²⁴¹ of his opponent Išme-Dagan will be “scattered” (*sapāḥum*) by Dagan, Šamaš, Itur-Mer, Belet-ekallim and Adad—the divine auxiliaries of Zimri-Lim.²⁴² In ARM 26 237, the goddess Annunitum insists that the king “should not go on campaign” (*ana gerrim lā tallak*)²⁴³ but should “stay in Mari, and I (the goddess) myself will continue to answer” (*ina Māri šib-ma u anākū-ma ātanappal*).²⁴⁴ In another of her oracles,²⁴⁵ the goddess tells Zimri-Lim that “I myself will massacre on your (the king’s) behalf” (*anāku elika aḥabbuṣ*) and promises him that “I will deliver your foe into your hand” (*nakrika ana qātika umalla*)—variations of which, are also pledged by deities elsewhere.²⁴⁶

That such a “quietist”²⁴⁷ image of the king was to be understood hyperbolically is already plain in the oracles themselves, where, despite the deities’ assurances of their divine assistance, the king is still instructed to act on his own

²³⁸ ARM 26 207: 25.

²³⁹ ARM 26 217: 25.

²⁴⁰ ARM 26 194: 11. Following the translation of Durand who understands ^{GI}*gur-na-[tum]* as a variant of *g/qurunnum* a term which, he claims, often designates “l’amoncellement des cadavres des ennemis vaincus” (idem, *Archives*, 418–19). Cf. Heimpel, *Letters to the King*, 249 n. 225.

²⁴¹ For this term, see K. Veenhof, “Observations on Some Letters from Mari (ARM 2, 124; 10, 4; 43; 84; 114) with a Note on *tillatum*,” *RA* 76 (1982) 128–33.

²⁴² Lines 19–34.

²⁴³ A similar divine instruction may also be attested in ARM 26 204: 13.

²⁴⁴ ARM 26 207: 24–26.

²⁴⁵ ARM 26 214: 10–14.

²⁴⁶ ARM 26 194: 39–40; 202: 13–14; 209: 12–14; 213: 21–22.

²⁴⁷ Moran, “New Evidence,” 40.

behalf. Thus, in as much as Annunitum promises to deal with those who would “challenge him in a rebellion” (*ina bārtim latākum*),²⁴⁸ the goddess nevertheless warns Zimri-Lim to “protect yourself” (*pagarka uṣur*), to surround himself with loyal servants,²⁴⁹ and to not go out alone.²⁵⁰ Elsewhere, Zimri-Lim is told that he himself is responsible to “not let the land entirely slip out from your hands” (*ištu qātika . . . mātam kalāša lā tuṣēši*)²⁵¹ despite the goddess pledging—on two occasions in the same oracle—that she will deal with the king’s Yaminite adversary.²⁵² Along the same lines, it is Zimri-Lim who “will restore order” (*š ešērum*), though he does so “with (the help) of auxiliaries” (*ana tillātim*);²⁵³ and it is the king who must “capture the city” (*ālam ṣabātum*) of Kurdâ, despite Šamaš claiming to have “given” (*nadānum*) him the land in the first place.²⁵⁴

The deities sometimes promise to provide their warrior king with various forms of “divine aid”²⁵⁵ that, in effect, imply he will be invincible in battle. Zimri-Lim is assured that he does not go out to battle alone, but that the deities themselves also “go out” (*alākum*)²⁵⁶ and “stand” (*izuzzum*)²⁵⁷ at his and his army’s “side” (*idum*), divinely “protecting” (*tuklum*)²⁵⁸ him and ensuring the “defeat” (*damdûm*)²⁵⁹ of his foes. Elsewhere, the king is promised that “wherever he (i.e. Zimri-Lim) goes, he cannot come to shame” (*ašar illiku ul bâš*) because the deity will “rage” (*raʾābum*) and “stand in victory” (*ina lītim izuzzum*) enabling the king to

²⁴⁸ ARM 26 213: 20–21.

²⁴⁹ The oracle specifies: “your most favoured servants whom you love” (*wardē libbika ša tarammu*).

²⁵⁰ ARM 26 213: 8–19.

²⁵¹ ARM 26 200: 14–16.

²⁵² ARM 26 200: 7–10, 18–20.

²⁵³ ARM 26 205: 6’.

²⁵⁴ ARM 26 194: 39–41.

²⁵⁵ Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 73.

²⁵⁶ See Epic of Zimri-Lim, lines 140–42 (Durand, *Archives*, 393).

²⁵⁷ ARM 26 194: 24–27.

²⁵⁸ Epic of Zimri-Lim, line 138 (Durand, *Archives*, 393).

²⁵⁹ ARM 26 194: 14, 26. For this translation, see Durand, *Archives*, 418–419.

“conquer” (*kašādum*) his adversary.²⁶⁰ Finally, in another oracle, the deity vows that Zimri-Lim will “conquer” (*kašādum*) and “stand over” (*elum izuzzum*) his adversary whose “days are running short” (*ūmum qerbū*) and “will not live long” (*ul balātum*) because of “what the deity will do to this man” (*ša ilum awīlam šāti ippešu*).²⁶¹

3.6.3 Divine Obligations of the King.

In addition to communicating their promises of divine protection, the deities also present the king with their demands. Most commonly, the king is directed to fulfill various cultic requests. These include: the return of cult statues;²⁶² the performance of “sacrifices” (*nīqum*)²⁶³ and funerary offerings;²⁶⁴ the supplying of temple stores²⁶⁵ such as “beer” (*šikārum*),²⁶⁶ “flour” (*qēmum*),²⁶⁷ and “pure water” (*mû zakūtum*);²⁶⁸ the provision of objects of “desire” (*erištum*)²⁶⁹ or “gifts” (*qīštum*)²⁷⁰ such as a “large throne” (*kussûm rabûm*),²⁷¹ a “large bronze sword” (*namšarum siparrum rabûm*),²⁷² a “commemorative monument” (*humusum*),²⁷³ “consecrated material”

²⁶⁰ ARM 26 211: 10–15.

²⁶¹ ARM 26 212: 5’–8’.

²⁶² ARM 26 203: 6–10.

²⁶³ ARM 26 218: 9; 220: 22.

²⁶⁴ ARM 26 220: 18–23; 221: 14–18. For discussion on the nature and overlapping character of the *pagrāum* and *kispum* offerings at Mari, see Sasson, “Calendar and Festivals,” 126–28, 131; M. Birot, “Fragment du rituel de Mari relatif au *kispum*,” in *Death in Mesopotamia*, ed. B. Alster (Mesopotamia 8 [=CRRAI 26]; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980) 139–50; A. Tsukimoto, *Untersuchungen zur Totenpflege (kispum) im alten Mesopotamien* (AOAT 216; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1985); B. Schmidt, *Israel’s Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (FAT 11; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994) 28–39; Durand and Guichard, “Les rituels,” 28, 35–36, 63–70.

²⁶⁵ ARM 26 223: 4’–8’.

²⁶⁶ ARM 26 198: 5’. Specifically, “Idatum-beer,” see M. Birot, *Textes administratifs de la salle 5 du palais (2e partie)* (ARM 12; Paris: Concours de la direction générale des affaires culturelles, 1964)

²⁶⁷ ARM 26 198: 6’.

²⁶⁸ ARM 26 215: 18.

²⁶⁹ ARM 26 194: 5; 217: 16, 19; 219: 8’; FM 7 39: 24.

²⁷⁰ ARM 26 194: 19.

²⁷¹ ARM 26 194: 4.

²⁷² ARM 26 194: 29

²⁷³ ARM 26 218: 7. For *humusum*, see J.-M. Durand and M. Guichard, “Les rituels,” 33.

(*asakkum*),²⁷⁴ an “estate” (*niḫlatum*),²⁷⁵ or, even, the king’s daughter.²⁷⁶ On occasion, however, the deities may also instruct the king on matters of domestic or foreign policy. The deities may “demand” (*erēšum*)²⁷⁷ that the king “stand” (*izuzzum*)²⁷⁸ with those who are “wronged” (*ḫabālum*) and “administer justice” (*dīnam diānum*) on their behalf;²⁷⁹ “command” (*dannātum*) a building project be commenced;²⁸⁰ prohibit the king from “making a treaty” (*napištam lapātum*) or “going to war” (*girram wašûm*) without first “consulting the deity” (*ilam šâlum*) or an “oracle” (*têrtum*);²⁸¹ or, they may also recommend that the king “promulgate an edict cancelling debts” (*andurārum wašārum*) in a foreign land.²⁸²

From the way in which most of these demands are presented, it seems clear that the king was expected, if not obliged, to fulfill them. The deities frequently express their demands by employing imperative²⁸³ and injunctive²⁸⁴ verbal forms, prohibitives,²⁸⁵ interrogatives,²⁸⁶ or, occasionally, a combination of these²⁸⁷—the rhetorical force of which indicates that the deities were issuing indirect commands and not merely expressing their wishes. On several of these occasions the deity’s demands are presented in relation to their past achievements on the king’s behalf, apparently with the expectation that their benevolent actions should be

²⁷⁴ ARM 26 194: 15; 206: 20.

²⁷⁵ FM 7 39: 20; According to line 32, the estate demanded is the “area of Alaḫtum” (*maskanam ša Alaḫtim*).

²⁷⁶ ARM 26 194: 5. Possibly referring to Erišti-Aya, see Durand, *Les documents* Vol. 3, 390–91.

²⁷⁷ FM 7 38: 11’; 39: 52, 55.

²⁷⁸ FM 7 38: 9’; 39: 54.

²⁷⁹ FM 7 38: 9’, 39: 54,

²⁸⁰ ARM 26 221bis: 16–17, 22–24.

²⁸¹ ARM 26 199: 30–32, 38–39, 49–50; FM 7 38: 12’–17’.

²⁸² ARM 26 194: 38, 42.

²⁸³ ARM 26 194: 18, 31; 217: 19, 20; 219: 21’; 221bis: 17; FM 7 38: 9’; 39: 54.

²⁸⁴ ARM 26 194: 7, 16, 21, 30; 203: 10; 206: 20; 215: 21; 220: 22; 221: 18; (poss.) 218: 7.

²⁸⁵ ARM 26 199: 38–39, 50.

²⁸⁶ ARM 26 215: 18–19; 223: 4’’–5’’.

²⁸⁷ ARM 26 194: 16–21, 30–31; 215: 18–21.

reciprocated.²⁸⁸ Similarly, divine demands are frequently also followed by promises of divine blessing of various kinds,²⁸⁹ thereby expressing the not-so-subtle message that the deity's favour—and, by extension, the stability of the king's rule—is conditioned upon the king's faithful fulfillment of the deity's demands.

Despite the king's duty to meet the deities' demands as well as the rewards promised to him if he did, the king's fidelity couldn't always be guaranteed. Occasionally, it seems, the deities had to resort to more forceful rhetoric—complaints and threats—to coerce the king into fulfilling their instructions. The deities bemoan the neglected state of their cult statues²⁹⁰ and shrines,²⁹¹ the substitution of their offerings with ingredients of a lower-grade,²⁹² that they had to “depend on themselves” (*ina pānīya aṭṭul*),²⁹³ or, that this wasn't even the first time they've complained to the king of his inaction.²⁹⁴ Elsewhere, the deities are much more menacing and warn the king that a failure to fulfill their demands would incur defeat,²⁹⁵ disaster,²⁹⁶ or plague²⁹⁷ as well as result in him being divinely dethroned,²⁹⁸ quite possibly through a usurpation, even as had previously occurred in the event of his father's infidelity.²⁹⁹

²⁸⁸ ARM 26 194: 24–31, 32–40; 217: 14–20; FM 7 38: 1'–17'; 39: 14–23, 49–55.

²⁸⁹ ARM 26 194: 4–12, 15–23, 39–43; 217: 16–27; 218: 6–8; FM 7 39: 23–28, 52–59.

²⁹⁰ ARM 26 203: 6–8.

²⁹¹ ARM 26 198: 12'–13'.

²⁹² ARM 26 198: 6'–7', 14'; 215: 18–19.

²⁹³ Literally, “I looked to myself.” ARM 26 198: 9'. Cf. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 30.

²⁹⁴ ARM 26 219: 7'–9'.

²⁹⁵ ARM 26 221bis: 26.

²⁹⁶ ARM 26 221bis: 25. Cf. Durand who translates *kurullum* as “cadavers” in this oracle (idem, *Archives*, 450–51).

²⁹⁷ ARM 26 206: 18. Lit. “a devouring will take place” (*ukultum iššakkan*)—a statement that is followed by reference to a “consecrated item” (*asakkum*) that, in Akkadian, is homonymic with “disease,” see CAD A/2 325–27, sub *asakku*.

²⁹⁸ FM 7 39: 19–23.

²⁹⁹ FM 38: 5–9. A fact which functions as an implied threat in this oracle where it is mentioned in the context of the deity's demands.

3.6.4 Summary.

For the most part, the prophetic oracles from Mari communicate a robust theology of kingship. According to the deities, the king's investiture had divine origins, wherein Zimri-Lim was initially raised from infancy and eventually restored to his father's former throne through divine intervention. Now enthroned as king, a number of oracles claim that his reign is divinely protected by the deities, not least from foreign opposition to Mari's strategic importance and expanding sphere of influence. Occasionally, the deities also remind Zimri-Lim that, commensurate with their divine appointment and protection, he has certain cultic and civic responsibilities—the dutiful fulfillment of which determines the continuity of their divine favour, and, thus, the security of his rule.

3.7 Responses to Prophecy.

In addition to the context and content of prophecy, the Mari letters also provide insight into the various responses that the phenomenon could elicit. The reactions to prophecy serve as a postscript to the overall report of prophecy and include: reporting them; evaluating them; and, giving recompense to the prophet.

3.7.1 Reporting Prophecy.

At first glance, a number of epilogues begin by making what appears to be a somewhat unremarkable and self-evident statement about the author's report. In its shortest and most frequently attested form,³⁰⁰ the authors claim of the prophetic oracle they have just quoted:

(inanna anumma) ana (ṣēr) bēlīya ašpuram
(Herewith,) I have forwarded it (un)to my lord.

³⁰⁰ ARM 26 214, 221, 220, 233, 243; FM 7 39.

Several letters expand on this phrase with the addition of an accusative, marking the relationship between the prophetic event and the report of it more explicitly:

ARM 26 217: 28.

I have forwarded to my lord the words of her (i.e. the prophetess's) mouth.

ARM 26 199: 54–56.

I have forwarded to my lord the report of the words which they (i.e. the prophet and prophetess) spoke to me.

ARM 26 206: 28–31.

Herewith, I have forwarded unto my lord the oracle which he (i.e. the prophet of Dagan) spoke and I recorded.

More than simply formulaic, these statements are in fact assertions that, by “forwarding to the king” their reports, the authors have faithfully fulfilled their duty to relay prophecies to their intended royal recipient. The charge to relay prophecy evidently came from various sources. In ARM 26 414, Yasin-El recounts how, before witnesses, he was charged by an unspecified “man” (*awīlum*)³⁰¹ with the responsibility to “convey” (*wabālum*) a tablet containing the divine message of Šamaš as dictated by a prophet:³⁰²

ARM 26 414: 38–40.

Convey this tablet immediately! That he (i.e. the king) may do what the tablet says.

Sending the report, along with the tablet, and thus discharging his responsibility, Yasin-El concludes his letter echoing the above examples:

ARM 26 414: 41–42.

Herewith, I have conveyed this tablet unto my lord.

³⁰¹ Specifically, the text records “this man” (*awīlum šū*) to which the immediate antecedent is the scribe Utu-kam who wrote the tablet. Alternatively, Atamrum, the prophet of Šamaš, has also been suggested. In which case, it would be the prophet, and not a third-party, who charges Yasim-El with the responsibility to relay the message, an example relevant to the next point.

³⁰² Charpin (“Prophètes et rois,” 14–15) suggests that Yasim-El refers to ARM 26 194.

In ARM 26 201, Baḥdi-Lim recounts how Aḥum had entrusted him with the “complete written report” (*tēmum gamrum šaṭer*) of a prophecy and material sample of a prophetess, apparently doing so with the same expectation as above—that they would, in turn, be “conveyed to my lord” (*ana šēr bēliya ušābīlam*).³⁰³ Forwarding these and thus fulfilling his duty, Baḥdi-Lim concludes his letter in language and style almost identical with previous examples:

ARM 26 201: 14–17.

Herewith, I have conveyed unto my lord Aḥum’s tablet as well as the hair and hem of the prophetess.

As well as third-party intermediaries, evidence also suggests that prophets, and, even the deities themselves, could charge an author with the responsibility to communicate their messages onward. In ARM 26 210, a woman, “the spouse of a gentleman” (*aššat awīlum*), prefaces her oracle against Babylon by enjoining Kabri-Dagan to “forward (the oracle’s contents) to your lord!” (*šupur ana bēlika*).³⁰⁴ While elsewhere, in ARM 26 215, it is the deity, Dagan himself, who, in the context of a quoted oracle, charges the king’s official to “report to your lord in order that he may give me clean water to drink!” (*ana bēlika šupur-ma u mē zakūtum lišqenni*).³⁰⁵

To what extent these examples demonstrate that officials were relaying their reports in response to pressures from below, one cannot be sure. What may be deduced, however, is that in addressing their letters to the king, authors felt obliged to inform Zimri-Lim of prophetic activity, and, if they neglected this responsibility, that they would be considered unreliable—or worse—unfaithful. Indeed, Nur-Sîn, Zimri-Lim’s official stationed in western Syria, explains that the two-fold reason for his report was not simply his faithfulness in keeping the king informed but also

³⁰³ Durand (*Archives*, 430) considers Baḥdi-Lim to be referring here to ARM 26 200, a letter of Aḥum to Zimri-Lim in which he reports the prophetic utterances of Ḫubatum, a *muḥḥūtum*.

³⁰⁴ ARM 26 210: 12.

³⁰⁵ ARM 26 215: 20–21.

because of his fear that, had he not relayed the oracles he heard and the king subsequently became aware of the prophet's activities from elsewhere, he could potentially be accused of withholding information in the event of something awry occurring:

FM 7 39: 34–44.

Formerly, when I lived in Mari, I would send to my lord whatever word was told to me by prophet or prophetess. Now, living in another land, would I not forward to my lord what I hear and *what* they tell me? If in the future any problem occurred, would not my lord say, “Why did you not communicate to me the word which the prophet said to you?”

Dutifully sending to Mari an extensive report of prophetic activities from his region, Nur-Sîn concludes by asserting again his unquestionable fidelity, echoing a now familiar mantra:

FM 7 39: 44–45.

Herewith, I forward it unto my my lord. My lord should know this.

Likewise, in ARM 26 197 Inib-šina, the king's sister and high priestess at the temple of Belet-ekallim at Mari, also strives to portray herself as a faithful informant. Her report on the recent prophetic activity of a *qammatum* begins by first reminding the king of her consistent reliability in relaying oracles both now and in the past:

ARM 26 197: 4–9.

Previously, Šelebum, the *assinnu*, delivered to me an oracle and I communicated it to you. Now a *qammatum* of Dagan of Terqa has come to me and spoken to me as follows...

The interplay between the obligation upon his faithful officials to report oracles and the high value the king placed upon receiving them comes together in ARM 26 196. In this text, Šamaš-našir, governor of Terqa, recalls that the king had asked him to report on prophetic oracles uttered in his city, enjoining him at a most critical time:

ARM 26 196: 5–10.

When my lord resolved to go on campaign, he charged me as follows, saying, “As you dwell in the city of God, communicate to me whatever oracle that occurs in God’s temple which you hear.”

That Zimri-Lim’s order to Šamaš-našir comes in the midst of the king’s manoeuvring toward a military conflict, indicates how prophetic reports were sought after as a valuable source of intelligence. Indeed, political and military losses could be minimised, avoided, or even exploited, through the effective gathering of intelligence. Strategically located around the kingdom, in centres like Terqa or even further abroad as Nur-Sîn’s location in Ḥalab suggests, there were clear expectations that, among their other official duties, the king’s representatives were duty-bound to keep their monarch well informed of all machinations relevant to the kingdom and especially to his rule.

3.7.2 Confirming Prophecy:

Besides reporting it, a number of letters indicate that another response to prophecy was to have it evaluated by a process of *têrtam epēšum* (“taking omens”), that is, subjecting the divine message to verificatory inquiries. These procedures were conducted by professional diviners who employed technical means—usually hepatoscopy or extispicy—to derive a result which would either confirm or deny its content.³⁰⁶ In ARM 26 204 and 217 *têrtam epēšum* occurs with “hair and hem” (*šārtum sissiktum*):

ARM 26 204: 16–25.

“Now my hair and my hem I give to you *that* they may clear *the matter*.”

Now I have forwarded the hair and hem to my Star *that* my Star may have an omen taken *so that* my Star may act in accordance with his omens.

ARM 26 217: 29–31.

Now I have forwarded her hair and her hem to my lord, *that* my lord may have an omen taken *so that* he may act according to *what* the deity answers my lord.

³⁰⁶ CAD T 364–367, sub *têrtu*.

In view of the usual association of *têrtam epēšum* with the entrails of sheep and goats, the question naturally arises as to how the “hair and hem” of these prophetesses functioned in such inquiries?³⁰⁷ Early interpreters speculated that “hair and hem” were personal tokens which functioned to identify the prophets and permit the threat of economic,³⁰⁸ magical,³⁰⁹ or legal³¹⁰ sanctions against them.³¹¹ However, the subsequent publication of ARM 26 204 and 217, both of which connect “hair and hem” with divination, provided clear evidence against such an understanding. Noting this, H. B. Huffmon suggested that the “hair and hem” functioned to represent the prophet in divinatory inquiries along the lines of the *tamītu* texts wherein “the person for whom the priest put the question was symbolically present.”³¹²

Huffmon’s original suggestion, made almost half a century ago on the basis of W. G. Lambert’s preliminary investigation of several *tamītu* texts,³¹³ has more recently been confirmed by Lambert’s updated studies.³¹⁴ These show that the

³⁰⁷ The collocation *šārtum sissiktum* also occurs in ARM 26 198, 200–203, 213, 214, 219, 237; FM 7 38. In ARM 26 215 the term *etqum qaqqadum* (“tuft of the head”) appears with *sissiktum* instead of the more common *šārtum* and ostensibly refers to divination by more or less the same means (Gordon, “From Mari to Moses,” 68); cf. Durand, *Archives*, 444; “Les prophéties,” 124. Interestingly, both are associated with extispicy in ARM 26 182.

³⁰⁸ G. Dossin, “Une révélation du dieu Dagan à Terqa,” *RA* 42 (1948) 134.

³⁰⁹ M. Noth, “Remarks on the Sixth Volume of Mari Texts,” *JSS* 1 (1956) 327–329; Ellermeier, *Prophetie in Mari*, 97–110 (esp. 102); J. Munn-Rankin, “Diplomacy in Western Asia in the Early Second Millennium B.C.,” *Iraq* 18 (1956) 91–92.

³¹⁰ Malamat, “Prophetic Revelations,” 225–27; Moran, “New Evidence,” 19–24.

³¹¹ Malamat (“Forerunner of Biblical Prophecy,” 47, 52 n. 39) continued to hold this view despite the publication of ARM 26 204 (orig. ARM 10 81) which clearly associates the “hair and hem” with divinatory inquiry.

³¹² Huffmon, “Mari letters,” 121.

³¹³ W. Lambert, “The ‘tamitu’ Texts,” in *La Divination en Mésopotamie ancienne et dans les régions voisines. XIVe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Strasbourg - 1965* (CRRAI 14; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966) 119–23.

³¹⁴ W. Lambert, “Questions Addressed to the Babylonian Oracle: The *tamītu* Texts,” in *Oracles et prophéties dans l’antiquité. Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 15-17 Juin 1995*, ed. J.-G. Heintz (Travaux du

phrase “hair and hem,” as occurs with prophecy in the Mari letters, is also attested in a number of other texts associated with divination (commonly extispicy), including multiple occurrences throughout the *tamītu* corpus.³¹⁵ Clearest in the latter, the “hair and hem” functioned there—along with other tokens³¹⁶—as the technical means by which the person, on whose behalf the extispicy inquiry was performed, was symbolically represented. As the following example illustrates:

Tamītu No. 9: 3–4

So-and-so, owner of this hair and hem, who is ill and lying upon his bed of fate...

During these divinatory procedures, Lambert notes, such tokens were customarily held in the hand of the inquiring *bārû* who placed it upon the head of the lamb as he addressed the examining questions to it.³¹⁷

There is one further point of correspondence between the image of divinatory inquiry in the *tamītu* texts and these pericopes. By collecting the “hair and hem” and performing extispicies, each sought to obtain a clear judgment with regard to the matter under examination. In *tamītu* texts, this is rendered by the diviner’s asking of binary questions and requesting that the deities “answer me with a reliable ‘Yes!’” (*kīna aplānni*). With the reports of prophecy, how one should respond to the divine message was subject to the verdict of extispicies, that is, the king should *ana zīm terêtīšu... līpuš* (“act in accordance with his oracles”),³¹⁸ or, in echoes of

Centre de Recherche sur le Proche-Orient et la Grèce antiques 15; Paris: de Boccard, 1997) 85–98; and *Babylonian Oracle Questions* (MC 13; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007).

³¹⁵ Lambert, *Babylonian Oracle Questions*, 15–17; cf. Huffmon, “Company of Prophets,” 50.

³¹⁶ In addition to samples of “hair and hem,” Lambert notes that, in one text (*Tamītu* No. 1: 234), a person’s “fingernail could also suffice. Alternatively, tokens were collected from animals (the “hair and bristles” of a horse, *tamītu* No. 9, 2) and fields (“dirt,” *Tamītu* No. 11 ii 10) when inquires into them were needed (see idem, *Babylonian Oracle Questions*, 15).

³¹⁷ Lambert, “Questions Addressed,” 92; and *Babylonian Oracle Questions*, 16.

³¹⁸ ARM 26 204: 23–25.

the *tamītu* texts, he should *ana kī ilu bēlī ippalu līpuš* (“act in accordance with what the deity answers my lord”).³¹⁹

As well as verifying a prophecy by divination, the attestation of *šālum* (Gt stem: “to consider; to reflect”) in the epilogues of ARM 26 199 and 243 indicates that prophetic oracles could also be evaluated by submitting them to the king for his consideration.

ARM 26 199: 56–57.

May my lord consider *it*, so that may he do *that* which is in accordance with his great kingship.

ARM 26 243: 17–19.

May my lord consider *it*, so that an answer to my letter may come according to the considerations which my lord will take.

In section 3.1.3, it was demonstrated that the term *šālum*, which occurs in the prologue, was associated with the prompting of oracles and is attested with technical means. In these examples, however, *šālum* lacks any link to divination. Instead, it refers to an evaluative process whereby the king is to “consider” the oracle just reported.³²⁰

In ARM 26 199 and 243, *šālum* is immediately followed by a dependent purpose clause.³²¹ This syntactical feature occurs fairly regularly among the examples of verification given already,³²² and, in the context of *šālum*, indicates that any implementation of an oracle’s contents was strictly contingent upon the king’s discretion. Clearest in ARM 26 243, the phrase *muštālūtīm ša bēlī ištallu* (“the considerations which my lord will take”), which contains the repetition of two

³¹⁹

³²⁰ CAD Š/1 280, sub *šālum*.

³²¹ On the second clause which, in a sequence of two or more clauses containing injunctive verbs, forms a purpose clause, see J. Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian* (HSMS 45; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005) §16.4; Cf. GAG³ §158 f.

³²² ARM 26 204 and 217.

alternative forms of *šalum*, embodies the “answer” (*meḥrum*) the author seeks, and forms the basis for authorising him to implement the oracle’s contents (lines 21–24).

Further hints of the king’s own discretionary authority over the confirmation and implementation of oracles also occurs in three other texts. In ARM 26 220 and 221, Kibri-Dagan echoes language similar to ARM 26 243, exhorting the king to “do *that* which appears best to him according to his considerations” (*ana kīma muštālūtīšu ša elīšu ṭābat līpuš*),³²³ and, to “do *that* which appears best to him” (*bēlī ša elīšu ṭābat līpuš*).³²⁴ Finally, the author of ARM 26 219 tells the king he should “do *that* which he deems best” (*bēlī ša epēšīšu līpuš*),³²⁵ despite having just noted that he (she?) has forwarded a sample of the prophet’s “hair and hem”—the material means for conducting evaluation by extispicy. In all, this is quite remarkable. It suggests that, with regard to evaluating a prophetic message, the king’s discretion occurred alongside divination and apparently was the final arbiter on deciding the reliability of the message’s contents.

3.7.3 Rewarding Prophets.

According to a number of texts, material rewards were given to prophets in response to their prophetic activity. Altogether, eleven administrative lists and two prophetic texts make reference to prophets, of various titles,³²⁶ receiving royal benefaction.³²⁷ Among the items awarded to prophets, one text records the outlay of

³²³ ARM 26 220: 26b–28.

³²⁴ ARM 26 221: 22–23.

³²⁵ For this translation of the idiomatic expression *ša epēšīšu līpuš* (lit. “may he do his deed”), see Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 54; Cf. Heimpel, *Letters to the King*, 262; Roberts, “Mari Prophetic Texts,” 237; Durand, *Archives*, 448; CAD E 227, sub *epēšum*.

³²⁶ As Gordon has previously noted, whilst not exclusively so, the most frequently attested prophetic title among beneficiaries is *muḥḥûm*. See Gordon, “From Mari to Moses,” 74.

³²⁷ Based on his reconstruction of the extant latter half of the obverse, Durand (*Archives*, 432) considers ARM 26 203 to also contain information relevant to the phenomenon of awarding prophets remuneration for their services. However, two points caution against this interpretation. First, the poorly preserved condition of the section makes any reconstruction quite speculative (only five signs

a donkey,³²⁸ but it was precious metals and vestments of different kinds and quality that were most frequently given.³²⁹

Two explanations have been given for this practice. Malamat, who understood titled intermediaries at Mari to exist largely as “cult prophets” (i.e. temple-based personnel), considered such endowments to reflect the prophets’ otherwise normal material dependence upon the royal court.³³⁰ However, other than reiterating that these items were supplied from royal coffers, Malamat provides nothing further to sustain his view that it was their cultic role which provided the primary circumstances for these rewards.

Alternatively, Gordon interprets the conferring of such items on prophets not merely as a result of their cult status, but as their reward for delivering messages. According to Gordon, by prophesying, the prophet actually fulfilled a “messenger function”—the equivalent to a delivery of an official communiqué by a *mār šiprim*—and thus, would have their “messenger” services correspondingly rewarded.³³¹ To support this, he points to an administrative text that not only records the awarding

are preserved out of the nine words supposedly in this section). Second, even if one accepts Durand’s reconstruction, it seems unlikely that the provision of a garment purportedly narrated here is related to the preceding prophetic event report on the basis that it begins with *šanītam* (“another matter”), a term usually employed to demarcate unrelated content. Consequently, ARM 26 203 will not be considered in this discussion.

³²⁸ A.3796 [*imērum*] ...*ina imēri ša šallat Ida-Maraš...*, “[A donkey] ...of the donkeys plundered from Ida-Maraš...” (Durand, *Archives*, 396–97).

³²⁹ *Šubātum* ARM 9 22: 14 and 26 206: 27; *šubātum išārum* (*tardennum*), “plain (second class) garment,” ARM 21 333: 34’, 43’ (cf. ARM 23 446: 9’, 19’) and 22 167: r. 8’; *šubātum uṭublu tardennum*, “second class *uṭublu* garment,” with the addition of 2 *paršigū šutū* (“woollen headcloths”) ARM 22 236: 6–10; *šubātum laḥarūm u šerretum*, “Laḥarūm garment and a nose ring” ARM 26 199: 51 (on the affiliation of this garment with the city of Laḥara, see Durand, *Archives*, 429). Silver: 1 *šiqil kaspum ina aban maḥīrim* (“one shekel of silver according to the stone weight of the market rate”) M.11436: 1–2 (Durand, *Archives*, 396); 1 *hullum kaspum* (“one silver ring”) ARM 25 142: 12–13; 1 *šewerum kaspim* (“one silver torc”) T.82 (Durand, *Archives*, 380). Bronze: 2 *zamrātū siparrum* (“2 copper nails”) ARM 25 15: 7–9. Nissinen considers A.4676: 4–6 to be an extract and its contents merely a duplicated summary of ARM 22 167 (see idem, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 86).

³³⁰ A. Malamat, *Mari and the Early Israelite Experience: Schweich Lectures 1984* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 85–86.

³³¹ Gordon, “From Mari to Moses,” 74–75.

of a silver ring to a *muhhûm* of Adad, but also explains that its bestowal was the result of a preceding prophetic event:

ARM 25 142: 12–15.

One silver ring for the prophet of Adad when he delivered an oracle for the king.

The same text appears to further confirm the prophet’s “messenger function” with the final phrase *awīlī ša šīprī* (“people who *are* messengers”).³³² Gordon makes no comment on this, but the phrase, which covers all of the list’s recipients (including the *muhhûm*), strongly implies that, with regard to his delivery of a “divine” message, the prophet was considered equivalent to the preceding servant of Ḫaya-Sumu who had “brought a report/message” (*bussurtam ublam*), and, as a messenger, was rewarded accordingly.³³³

Fulfilment of their messenger function, however, was no guarantee to prophets that they would be rewarded. Indeed, there are indications that recompense was not automatic and that prophets occasionally had to resort to making direct requests.

ARM 26 199: 51–52.

She requested one *laḥarûm* garment as well as a nose ring, and so I gave them to her.

ARM 26 206: 23–27.

“...and for the wellbeing of your lord, Zimri-Lim, clothe me with one garment.” This is what he (i.e. the prophet) said to me. Thus, for the wellbeing of my lord, I clothed him with one garment.

Sasson has claimed, on the basis of ARM 26 199, that prophets made reward-requests in order to indicate that their missions were “completed.”³³⁴ Yet, this seems unlikely, not least but because the remainder of the text itself narrates that

³³² ARM 25 142: 17. The same phrase also occurs in A.4676 where, among other beneficiaries of royal patronage listed in the text, it also refers to a prophet (*muhhûm*).

³³³ Note that the full statement ZI.GA *awīlī ša šīpri* refers primarily to the actual outlay of items, and not simply to the status of the recipients.

³³⁴ Sasson, “Mari Apocalypticism,” 603.

the activity of the *qammatum*, the prophetess who “requested” the reward of a garment, was far from finished. According to Sammetar’s description, after uttering this oracle in Terqa the prophetess continued onto Mari where she repeated the oracle before Inib-šina in the temple of Belet-ekallim.³³⁵ Parker considered these requests to reflect the prophets’ self-interest for personal gain, and, the authors’ inclusion of them, to highlight “circumstances that may be pertinent to the recipient’s judgement of the oracle.”³³⁶ Whilst not denying the likelihood that prophetic oracles could (and were) sometimes delivered to secure personal interests, or, even, that the base motives of prophets represent an important factor for assessing what they have said, however, as there is no explicit evidence in either text for these suggestions, they remain speculative.

3.7.4 Summary.

In response to prophecy, audiences were clearly expected to report what they heard to the king and risked being held responsible to him, possibly even punished, if anything untoward happened in the event that they failed to do so. Decisions over what should be done in response to a divine message were ultimately contingent upon the message being confirmed either by the haruspex—who could perform an extispicy with the prophet “symbollically present” in a specimen of their hair and hem—or by the king himself, whose position, it seems, entitled him to a certain degree of discretionary authority. As for the prophets themselves, being “messengers” of the deity, they could expect some kind of reward comesurate with their function, although there obviously were no guarantees, and, so, some resorted to making demands.

³³⁵ ARM 26 199: 52–54; see also ARM 26 197.

³³⁶ Parker, “Official Attitudes,” 56.

This completes our analysis and discussion of prophecy in the Mari sources. At its most basic, the sources describe a phenomenon which, although bereft of inductive techniques, could nevertheless still be prompted through sacrifice, entreaties, and by directly inquiring of the prophetic intermediaries themselves. The latter were typically denoted by the titles *muḥḥûm* (f. *muḥḥûtum*) and *āpilum* (f. *āpiltum*), although, clearly, the phenomenon of speaking prophetic oracles was not limited to them only. Prophets were both male and female, could be active alone or in groups, and were regarded by their contemporaries to have the status of messengers. They were active on behalf of a range of deities inside and outside temples as well as being attested from various locales across the fertile crescent. The sources indicate that the prophets themselves could seek to communicate their oracles in written form, although, more typically, they spoke divine messages aloud to their immediate audiences and occasionally accompanied their utterances with symbolic actions. In accordance with the nature of the corpus, the oracles invariably address the king, their contents repeating the common themes of the king's divine investiture, his divine support, and divine obligations. Audiences appear to have had a duty to report the oracles they heard to the king, supplying him with the material means to have their allegedly divine messages secondarily checked by extispicy. The prophets could be rewarded commensurate with their messenger status, although, it seems, they might just as well make such demands themselves.

Now we turn our attention to the phenomenon of prophecy evident within the Neo-Assyrian sources. Of course, by definition, we may already expect there to be some degree of comparability between the two corpora, at least on a general level. However, to what extent they agree on many of the details discussed already, is yet to be determined.

4. Corpus of Neo-Assyrian Texts Related to Prophecy.

The publications of Parpola and Nissinen currently serve as the most comprehensive anthologies of texts related to the phenomenon of Neo-Assyrian prophecy.¹ Taking these seminal works as their foundation, several subsequent studies have attempted to expand the list of relevant texts, arguing for the re-evaluation of previously excluded texts and drawing attention to hitherto unnoticed references to prophecy.² For the purpose of this investigation into the Neo-Assyrian prophetic phenomenon, and crudely sorted into otherwise general categories, I propose the following corpus of materials:

Oracle reports:

- SAA 9 5 (K.6259). Identified as a “word of Ištar of Arbela” (*abāt Issār ša Arbail*) in the opening line, this oracle report is probably addressed to the queen

¹ Parpola’s 1997 publication of *Assyrian Prophecies* contains only the so-called oracle reports and oracle collections. Complementing this, in the following year Nissinen published *References to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources* to address the sizeable volume of material related to the study of prophecy that variously occurs in other genres. Nissinen’s 2003 publication *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* assembles all relevant texts from both of these two volumes and presents it, alongside material from the Mari and West-Semitic sources, in a highly accessible single work. To date, this volume remains the most comprehensive single anthology of ancient Near Eastern material related to prophecy.

² Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy*, 40–76; de Jong, *Isaiah*, 171–188, 395–439; Mack, “A Comparative Analysis,” 170–215; Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 103–10; J. Atkinson, “Prophecy in K1285?: Re-evaluating the Divine Speech Episodes of Nabû,” in *Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela’: Prophecy in Israel, Assyria and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian period*, eds. R. Gordon and H. Barstad (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013) 59–89.

mother Naqia.³ The oracle promises the protection of her exiled son Esarhaddon and his eventual victory over “his enemies” (*ayyābīšu*) his brothers.

- SAA 9 6 (Bu 91-5-9 106+). A report of an oracle prophesied (*ragāmu*) by Tašmetu-ereš on behalf of the goddess Ištar who promises to restore order (*tuqqunu*).
- SAA 9 7 (K.883). This report records multiple utterances of the prophetess Mullissu-kabtat which are addressed to the crown prince Assurbanipal. Identified as a “word of Queen Mullissu” (*abat šarrati Mullissu*) in the opening line, the oracles contain promises of a successful accession to the Assyrian throne, unchallenged suzerainty, the defeat of Gomer and Egypt, and various personal reassurances.
- SAA 9 8 (K.1545). This report contains several prophetic “utterances (*dibbi*)” spoken by an unidentified deity who promises the end of the Elamites and describes their destruction in highly metaphorical terms.
- SAA 9 9 (K.1292+). Addressed to Assurbanipal, Ištar describes her intimate concern for the king’s welfare and her faithful support for him among the divine pantheon. The colophon indicates that the report was written toward the end of the second year of Šamaš-šumu-ukin’s Babylonian rebellion (18th day of Nisan, 650 B.C.).⁴
- SAA 9 10 (83-1-18 726). This small fragment apparently records the utterances of a prophetess whose oracle recounts divine promises to give kingship to its royal addressee.

³ The feminine suffix in line 4 indicates the oracle was addressed to a female. According to Parpola, the oracle shares similar content with SAA 9 1.8-9, 2.1, and 2.6, oracles addressed to Naqia (*idem*, *Assyrian Prophecies*, LXX).

⁴ For a chronology of this rebellion, see G. Frame, *Babylonian 689–627 B.C.: A Political History* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1992) 131–190.

- SAA 9 11 (K.1974). This fragment records a prophetic oracle followed by a “vision” (*diglu*). The oracle promises the divine defeat of an unpreserved enemy of Assurbanipal.

Collections of oracle reports:

- SAA 9 1 (K.4310) and 9 2 (K.12033+). These two archival tablets contain multiple oracles which are addressed to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 1.1-6, 9-10; 9 2.2-6), the queen mother Naqia (SAA 9 1.7-8), or both (SAA 9 2.1). According to Parpola, the contents of these collections reflect that the oracles were probably delivered at the end of the bloody civil war Esarhaddon had fought with his usurping brothers (SAA 9 1) and shortly after his ascension to the throne (SAA 9 2).⁵ As such, their content reflects both the heightened drama of the conflict and the subsequent sociopolitical tensions immediately afterward as Esarhaddon sought to consolidate his kingdom.
- SAA 9 3 (K.2401). In contrast to the collections SAA 9 1-2, oracles in this collection appear to have been arranged thematically, dividing them into two primary sections by ritual instructions and double scribal lines.⁶ The content of the oracles focuses upon both Aššur’s and Ištar’s divine establishment of Esarhaddon’s reign over Assyria and its neighbors. In another departure from the other collections, a final colophon at the end of the tablet attributes the oracles to a single prophet.
- SAA 9 4 (83-1-18 839). According to Parpola, this fragment was previously part of a much larger multi-column tablet, presumably similar to SAA 9 1-3.⁷ All that remains, however, is part of an oracle apparently addressed to Esarhaddon

⁵ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, LXVIII–LXX.

⁶ Hence, Stökl (*Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 107) considers SAA 9 3 to reflect a “ritual text” rather than an oracle collection.

⁷ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, LIX.

which records an unidentifiable speaking deity's promise to defeat the king's enemies. It is unclear if this refers to an internal or external threat.

Letters that refer to prophets and/or oracles:

- SAA 10 24 (K.527).⁸ Written by a highly ranking trio of officials from Esarhaddon's inner circle,⁹ the letter explains a sudden and unexpected interruption to the planned return of the statue of Marduk from Assyria to Babylon.¹⁰ While in Labbanat, a border town proximate to Babylonia,¹¹ one of the two "servants of the household of the crown prince" claims to have received an oracular message (r. 9–11) from Bel (Marduk) and his consort Zarpanitu apparently cautioning against the return of their statues to Babylon.¹²
- SAA 10 109 (82-5-22 105). Bel-ušeziḫ, a chief exorcist, complains to Esarhaddon that "prophets and prophetesses" (*raggimānu raggimātu*) are being summoned to the royal court despite his faithfulness both past and present.¹³
- SAA 10 111 (83-1-18 1). Also from Bel-ušeziḫ, in this letter he quotes a prophetic utterance of Bel (r. 23–26e) which confirms the exorcist's own word

⁸ Parpola considers the letter's quote of divine speech as akin to the oracular utterances in Assyrian royal inscriptions, see idem, idem, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Part II: Commentary and Appendices* (AOAT 5; Kevelaer: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983) 33. Nissinen, on the other hand, despite being familiar with the text (idem, *References to Prophecy*, 141 n. 537), excludes it from his extensive corpus of prophetic texts. Alternatively, de Jong and Stökl both consider the letter to be recording a prophetic quote. See de Jong, *Isaiah*, 176; Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 104.

⁹ One official, Adad-šumu-ušur, is also the author of another letter which reports prophecy: SAA 10 199.

¹⁰ On this as the most likely background to the text, see Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars*, 32.

¹¹ Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 33.

¹² De Jong, *Isaiah*, 305–06.

¹³ De Jong (*Isaiah*, 178, 399) and Stökl (*Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 104) both consider the "sign of kingship" (*ittu ša šarrūti*) on the obverse (lines 13'–15') to be the quotation of a prophetic oracle. Nissinen, however, connects this phrase with the astrological observations contained on the tablet's reverse in lines r. 14–15 (idem, *References to Prophecy*, 91–92).

regarding Esarhaddon's reconciliation to Marduk and reminds the king of his responsibilities to Babylon.¹⁴

- SAA 10 174 (K.2701A). The letter of Marduk-šumu-ušur to Assurbanipal recalls a previous oracle spoken to Esarhaddon on the eve of his father's conquering of Egypt (line 14).¹⁵
- SAA 10 199 (82-5-22 168).¹⁶ Adad-šumu-ušur recounts the testimony of a man who claims to have received an oracular message from an unidentified deity (r. 6'-10'). The content of the oracle threatens the recipient with death if he, or anyone else whom he tells, does not inform the palace of what they have heard.
- SAA 10 284 (K.1033). In this letter, another of Esarhaddon's chief exorcists writes to the king quoting an oracle of the Ištar of Arbela and Nineveh (r. 4-8). The content of the oracle affirms the goddesses' commitment to rid Assyria of traitors.
- SAA 10 294 (K.4267). Among his other hardships, the exorcist and former deputy chief physician Urad-Gula laments a failed consultation he had with a prophet (*raggimu*) toward the end of his letter. In lines r. 31-32 he claims that the prophet was "unresponsive and lacked a vision" (*mahḥur u diglu untatṭi*).¹⁷

¹⁴ In view of the fact that Stökl considers the ambiguous background to this quote to have its origins in astrology, it is uncertain why he includes it as a source for Neo-Assyrian prophecy (idem, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 104).

¹⁵ Nissinen equivocates on the prophetic character of this quotation, saying, "against the background of LAS 317 (SAA 13 37): r. 6 it is not excluded that they were proclaimed by a prophet" (idem, *References to Prophecy*, 79). Nevertheless, the text is excluded from *Prophets and Prophecy*. Alternatively, de Jong (*Isaiah*, 178) and Stökl (*Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 104) both consider the quote to represent a legitimate oracle of Sin.

¹⁶ Though Nissinen seems to have been familiar with the text (idem, *References to Prophecy*, 129), it is not included in *Prophets and Prophecy*. Likewise, neither de Jong nor Stökl recognize the quotation of the deity's utterance as prophetic.

¹⁷ In contrast to Parpola, de Jong argues that attestations of term *diglu* does not refer to prophetic visions and that this line should alternatively be read as *lā āmur-ma aḥḥur u diglu untatṭi* "I did not see (happiness) and my eyesight is diminishing" (idem, *Isaiah*, 292-93). In this interpretation, he is followed by Stökl (*Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 104 n. 11).

- SAA 10 352 (K.168). Mar-Issar reports on the successful proceedings of the substitute king ritual, during which, a prophetess (*raggintu*) had uttered an oracle (obv. 22–r. 4). The oracle was addressed to Damqî, the substitute king, and its contents confirmed both the substitute’s legitimate kingship as well as the deity’s support against opposition.
- SAA 13 37 (K.540). Adad-aḥu-iddina seeks Esarhaddon’s decision with regard to an oracle prophesied (*ragāmu*) by the prophetess (*raggintu*) Mullissu-abu-uri. According to the temple official, the prophetess had already taken charge of the royal regalia, and now, the oracle demanded the throne as well (obv. 11–r. 9). As in SAA 10 352 (see above), the substitute king ritual is usually held as the background of this letter as well.¹⁸
- SAA 13 139 (83-1-18 361). This letter begins with the first person speech of a deity (obv. 1–12).¹⁹ Aššur-ḥamatu’a, a functionary at the temple of Ištar in Arbela, reports to Assurbanipal the words of Bel (i.e. Marduk) who claims to have been successfully reconciled with the goddess, and by extension, with Assyria.
- SAA 13 144 (Bu 91-5-9 145). Nabû-reši-išši, a member of the temple personnel in Arbela,²⁰ reports on prophetic activity and provides a quote of the oracle

¹⁸ Originally suggested by W. von Soden (“Beiträge zum Verständnis der neuassyrischen Briefe über die Ersatzkönigriten” in *Vorderasiatische Studien. Festschrift für Viktor Christian zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. K. Schubert [Wein: Notring der wissenschaftlichen Verbände Österreichs, 1956] 100–07), this view has been accepted by Parpola and others. See Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars. Part. II*, 329; Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 167.

¹⁹ S. Cole and P. Machinist, the letter’s original editors, consider its divine words to be prophetic (idem, *Letters from Priests to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal* [SAA 13; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1998] XVII). In contrast, Parpola claims it to reflect a “theophany” (idem, *Assyrian Prophecies*, LXXVII, CIV n. 235). Nissinen’s opinion on the prophetic character of Bel’s speech has shifted to where he now holds that “the language and idea of the divine message fully concur with extant prophecies” (idem, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 136. Cf. *References to Prophecy*, 56 n. 270; “Socioreligious Role,” 97 n. 40; “Orality and Writtenness,” 259 n. 89).

²⁰ PNA L-N 864, sub Nabû-rēši-išši.

uttered (r. 7–s.1). In the oracle, the unidentified divine speaker criticizes the king (probably Esarhaddon) for giving timber to the Egyptians which otherwise actually belonged to the deity.

- SAA 13 148 (K.10865). This small fragment originally reported a message (*šipirtu*) from a votary (*šēlūtu*) of Arbela to the king (possibly Esarhaddon).²¹ Excepting the goddess Ištar's name, nothing of the actual oracle remains, however.
- SAA 16 59–61 (82-5-22 108+, K.1034+, and 82-1-18 508 respectively). These three letters of Nabû-reḫtu-uṣur outline his deep concerns over an unfolding conspiracy that was taking place in Ḫarran against Esarhaddon. Writing directly to the king, he records the seditious utterance of a slave girl (SAA 13 59: 4'–5'), purportedly the divine speech of Nusku, and recommends she be examined by extispicy. Throughout the letters, Nabû-reḫtu-uṣur also includes various paraphrased oracles of support from key deities of the Assyrian pantheon.
- ABL 839.²² This letter of Nabû-bel-šumate to Assurbanipal concerns the shifting political status of Elam and the Sealand following Teumman's defeat to Assyria.²³ The writer reports two oracles containing divine instructions to the king on what he should do next (r. 11–15).²⁴ The first of these, uttered by Nabû and Marduk, instructs Assurbanipal to annex these regions and to install over

²¹ Despite admitting its "affinities to (SAA 9) 1.7," Parpola denies the prophetic character of this letter fragment on the basis of it being a *šipirtu*. Nissinen, however, does not consider this to obstruct its consideration as a specimen of prophecy. As such, he aligns himself with the text's original editors.

²² Published by R. Mattila, "The Political Status of Elam after 653 B.C. According to ABL 839," *SAAB* 1 (1987) 27–30.

²³ On the background of this undated letter, see Mattila, "The Political Status of Elam," 27–30. Alternatively, H. Baker considers that reference to the king of Elam, described in line 9 as having suffered a stroke, was Tammartu (*PNA* L-N 812, sub *Nabû-bēl-šumāti*).

²⁴ Parpola and Nissinen both seem to have been unaware of the presence of divine speech in this text (as indicated by *mā* particles in obv. 13 and 18). De Jong was the first to include this alongside other prophetic oracles (idem, *Isaiah*, 179). He has subsequently been followed by Stökl (*Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 105).

each “a prince from among his servants” (*mār šarri ištēn ultu libbi wardīšu*) as their governors. Regrettably, nothing of the second oracle is preserved.

Royal inscriptions which refer to prophets and/or prophecy:

Esarhaddon:

- Nin A: ii 6–7; Ass A: ii 12–26.²⁵ Esarhaddon twice claims to have regularly received “prophetic messages” (*šipir maḥḥê*; lit. “messages of the prophets”). In Nin A, prophetic messages are described as “messages of the gods and Ištar” (*našparti ilāni u Ištār*). In the Ass A inscription, prophetic messages occur as one among several forms of divine communication that assure the king of the consolidation of his rule.

- Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty: SAA 2 6: 116–17 (ND 4336); T.1801.²⁶

Esarhaddon’s succession treaty commands that seditious words spoken by anyone must be reported to the crown prince Assurbanipal and not concealed. Along with various other personnel, prophets—both *maḥḥû* and *raggimu*—are specifically mentioned.

Assurbanipal:

- Asb. A: iii 4–7.²⁷ Pivoting between descriptions of the Mannean defeat and the assassination of their king, Assurbanipal recalls a previous utterance of Ištar promising divine victory over Aḥšeri.
- Asb. A: vi 107–18.²⁸ In this episode, Assurbanipal explains the background behind his restoration of the cult of Nanaya and the repatriation of her statue

²⁵ For the most recent edition of these texts, see E. Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 B.C.)* (RINAP 4; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011) 9–26, 119–29.

²⁶ J. Lauinger, “Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty at Tell Tayinat: Text and Commentary,” *JCS* 64 (2012) 87–123.

²⁷ For text, see R. Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals: Die Prismenklassen A, B, C = K, D, E, F, G, H, J und T sowie andere Inschriften* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996) 35.

from Elam to Uruk. These actions, he claims, were the fulfillment of her oracular (note *umma*) divine message (Asb. A: vi 113–15).²⁹

- K.2638: 1–13.³⁰ This fragment represents an alternative version of the background to Nanaya’s return from exile. In contrast to Assurbanipal’s account in Asb. A: vi 107–18 and its duplicates, in K.2638 there apparently is no divine quote, or at least, none survives. Rather, Assurbanipal reports having received prophetic messages (*šipir maḥḥê*) from Nanaya (obv. 8). This variation is important, for it further commends the prophetic origins of Nanaya’s divine speech in the episode’s other versions.
- Asb. B: v 15–99.³¹ The extended account of Assurbanipal’s defeat of the Elamite king Teumman initially records two brief statements uttered by Ištar (Asb. B: v 47–49). These oracles were apparently given in response to the long and desperate prayer of the Assyrian king and promise her “compassion” (*rašû rēmu*) toward him. Secondly, upon the climax of the ensuing battle, the account records that prophetic messages (*šipir maḥḥê*) were received in addition to other divine assurances (Asb. B: v 95).

²⁸ The account is also duplicated in Asb. F v 72–vi 11, T v 9–32, and TTaf1 iv 12–35. See Borger, *Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, 57–58.

²⁹ Despite acknowledging that the oracle is formulated as direct speech and that its content resembles prophetic concerns, Nissinen (*References to Prophecy*, 40–41) claims that Nanaya’s brief discourse closely parallels the prediction-fulfillment pattern of literary predictive texts—especially the Uruk Prophecy—and excludes it from consideration as prophecy. De Jong (*Isaiah*, 179, 403) accepts Nissinen’s reasoning that the oracle was composed *ex eventu* by a scribe, but considers it an example of prophecy nonetheless. Finally, Stökl (*Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 135–36) rejects Nissinen’s argument and prefers the episode’s identification as a prophecy. On the firm identification of this text with prophecy, see the discussion of K.2638.

³⁰ Nissinen, de Jong, and Stökl all seem unaware of this fragment. For the text, see T. Bauer, *Das Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, vol. 2 (Assyriologische Bibliothek, Neue Folge; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1933) 61–62.

³¹ The episode is duplicated in Asb. C vi 7–131 and K.2652, see Borger, *Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, 99–104.

- Asb. T: ii 7–48.³² Two separate references to prophecy appear in this section. The first occurs in line 16. Here, Assurbanipal mentions that the Queen of Kidmuri (i.e. Ištar) had sent prophetic messages (*šipir maḥḥê*) calling for the repatriation of her statue and the restoration of her cult. Following this, he quotes the spoken (note: *umma*) “word of Sîn” (*amāt Sîn*) in lines 33–35, an oracle which anticipates Assurbanipal’s restoration of Eḫulḫul, the temple of Sîn at Harran.³³
- Votive Inscription to Marduk (K.120B+).³⁴ In this inscription, Assurbanipal quotes a spoken “divine message” (*šipru ilūtu*) of Marduk which promises the divine defeat of the king’s enemies (obv. 24–26).

Literary compositions with prophets and/or prophecy:

- SAA 3 13 (K.1285).³⁵ This text, commonly called the “Dialogue between Assurbanipal and Nabû,” comprises seven episodes of direct discourse that roughly alternate between the king and the deity in a dialogic pattern. Despite the absence of a human intermediary,³⁶ there are two primary grounds upon which the four speeches of Nabû may be considered as prophetic.³⁷ First, a narrative remark in obv. 13 describes the words of Nabû as being oracular. That is, as with many other prophetic oracles, they were also “spoken” (*qabû*). Secondly, the deity’s utterances overlap semantically and thematically with many of the undisputed prophetic oracles. Nabû exhorts Assurbanipal to “fear not” (*lā tapallāḥ*), and, among other words of reassurance, promises the defeat of

³² Duplicated in Asb. C i 53–84, see Borger, *Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, 140–43.

³³ Though Nissinen provides no explanation for his decision to exclude this quotation of Sîn from *Prophets and Prophecy*, he presumably does so for the same reasons he rejects the quoted oracle of the Queen of Kidmuri in Asb. A vi 107–18 (see idem, *References to Prophecy*, 41 n. 187). That is, he considers it to be a purely scribal creation which has no historical basis in a prophetic event. De Jong also excludes it from his corpus of prophetic texts. Stökl, in contrast, includes this episode and speculates that “Assurbanipal was innovatively adapting the function of prophecy to legitimize his re-building programme and, beyond that, of his kingship too” (idem, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 136).

his enemies. Although Ištar does not speak in this text, Nabû describes the goddess using much of the same rich imagery as is commonly found in other prophetic oracles.

- SAA 3 23 (83–1–18 142). On obv. 5' of the badly damaged "Epical Text Mourning the Death of a King" a male (unpreserved) is described to have "wailed like a prophet (*maḥḥû*)."³⁸

³⁴ De Jong first suggested the pericope as a prophetic reference (idem, *Isaiah*, 179), an identification Stökl (*Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 107) accepts. For text, see Borger, *Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, 201–03.

³⁵ Over time, Nissinen's view on the prophetic character of SAA 3 13 has shifted. Early-on he defended its divine speeches of Nabû as prophetic (idem, "Die Relevanz der neuassyrischen Prophetie für die alttestamentliche Forschung," in *Mesopotamica-Ugaritica-Biblica: Festschrift für Kurt Bergerhof*, eds. M. Dietrich and O. Loretz [AOAT 232; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1993] 219 n. 8) and included the text among his corpus of "neuassyrischer Prophetensprüche" (idem, *Prophetie, Redaktion, und Fortschreibung im Hoseabuch: Studien zum Werdegang eines Prophetenbuches im Lichte von Hos 4 und 11* [AOAT 231; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1991] 405–06). More recently, however, he has excluded SAA 3 13 from *Prophets and Prophecy*. To my knowledge, Nissinen has never made explicit the reason for his change of opinion. I can only guess from a brief footnote of his (idem, "Spoken, Written, Quoted, and Invented: Orality and Writtenness in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy," in *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*, eds. E. Ben Zvi and M. Floyd [SBLSymS 10; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000] 97–98 n. 44) that Nissinen now concurs with Pongratz-Leisten who considers it a "eine literarische Kreation in Anlehnung an die Gattung der Prophetensprüche" (idem, *Herrschaftswissen in Mesopotamien*, 75). De Jong (*Isaiah*, 412) also accepts Pongratz-Leisten's argument and identifies SAA 3 13 as a literary derivative of prophecy on the grounds that it is "unlikely to go back to orally delivered words." Adopting de Jong's terminology, Stökl (*Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 137–38) identifies SAA 3 13 as a "Literary Derivative of Prophecy" on the basis that it fails to "contain only an (elaborated) oracle," and has several speech episodes of Assurbanipal interspersed with those of Nabû.

³⁶ S. Butler (*Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals* [AOAT 258; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998] 83) mentions the possibility that the *zaqīqu*, mentioned in obv. 23, could occasionally denote "a professional who may have prophesied..."

³⁷ For an extended discussion on the identification of the divine speech episodes in SAA 3 13 with prophecy, see Atkinson, "Prophecy in K1285?" 59–89.

³⁸ Despite Nissinen (*References to Prophecy*, 9 n. 34) referring to this occurrence, he excludes it from *Prophets and Prophecy* without explanation. Stökl (*Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 103) discounts this attestation of *maḥḥû* on the basis that he considers its context "a literary creation which includes an oracle written by the author of the 'epic text', rather than pretending to go back to 'history.'" However, the term *maḥḥû* follows *akī* ("like/as"), a preposition denoting similarity, and thus should not be confused as the actual speaker but only an example to whom the speaker's behaviour (i.e. "wailing" *kullu*) was considered duly comparable.

- SAA 3 31 (K.8016). In this shorter account of Assurbanipal's defeat of Teumman,³⁹ Ištar provides an oracular response to the king's prayer (18'-r. 2). Whilst the tablet's poorly preserved state precludes any meaningful restoration of the goddess's speech, the few legible words remaining are clearly absent from the prophetic episode recorded in Asb. B: v 47-49.⁴⁰
- K.8204.⁴¹ In obv. 7 of this acrostic prayer to Nabû, the author likens his intense state of distress (*nalputu*) to that of a confused prophet (*maḥḥû*).

Cultic or omen texts with prophets and/or prophecy:

- SAA 3 34 (VAT 9555); 35 (K.6333+). The Assur (SAA 3 34: 28-29) and Nineveh (SAA 3 35: 31) versions of the Marduk Ordeal text each record an episode whereby a prophet (*maḥḥû*) is quoted uttering a lament for Bēl on behalf of the Lady of Babylon.⁴²
- Ritual of Ištar and Dumuzi A IIa: 31 (K.2001+).⁴³ Part of the healing rites performed during the ritual included the provision of bread to male and female prophets (*maḥḥû*, *maḥḥûtu*) and cult ecstasies (*zabbu*).
- *Šumma ālu* (K.6097 and dupls.).⁴⁴ Lines 101-02 mention the presence of numerous male and female prophets as one context whereby a city will "fall" (*nazāk*).

³⁹ Compare with Asb. B v 15-99 above.

⁴⁰ Though Nissinen (*References to Prophecy*, 53) refers to the oracle in this text as a possible paraphrase of Asb. B v 49-50, he nevertheless excludes it from *Prophets and Prophecy*. More recently, de Jong (*Isaiah*, 276) considers it to be a prophetic oracle, while Stökl makes no mention of the episode.

⁴¹ Not included in *Prophets and Prophecy*. For text, see S. Strong, "On Some Babylonian and Assyrian Alliterative Texts. 1," *PSBA* 17 (1895) 137-41. For a recent translation, see B. Foster (*Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 3rd ed. [Bethesda: CDL Press, 2005] 701) who translates *maḥḥû* not as "a prophet" but as "one possessed."

⁴² Even though the speaker remains ambiguous (the quote is preceded only by the particle *mā*), there can be little doubt that, like the exorcists who precede this episode, the speaker here was the prophet. In this context, it is likely that the quote: "They are taking him to the river ordeal!" (*ana ḥursān ubbulūšu*) represents the words of the goddess which he speaks on her behalf.

⁴³ W. Farber, *Beschwörungsrituale an Ištar und Dumuzi: Atti Ištar ša Ḥarmaša Dumuzi* (VOK 30; Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1977) 129, 140-41.

- *Šumma izbu* (K.3998 and dupls.).⁴⁵ Line 7 mentions that the seizure (*naphat*) of the land by prophetesses (*maḥḥiātum*) is indicated by certain birth anomalies.
- A Commentary on Birth Omens (K.1913).⁴⁶ Male and female prophets (*maḥḥû*, *maḥḥiātum*) are presented in lines 365d–e as being equivalent to people “possessed” or “ecstatic” (*šēḥu*).

Lexical lists with prophets:

- MSL 17.4.3. Recently, Stökl has noted that the term “prophet” (*muḥḥû*) is presented as an equivalent to the composite logogram LÚ.GUB.BA in the lexical Series Erim-ḥuṣ = *anantu* (III: 169).⁴⁷
- MSL 12.4.212 and 222. The term “prophet” (*maḥḥû*) is attested three times in the Canonical Series LÚ = ša. The first occurs in the Short Recension I of Tablet I as the equivalent to LÚ.GUB.BA (line 213). A second and third occur together in Tablet IV (lines 116–117) where the masculine form *maḥḥû* is variously identified with LÚ.NÍ.SU.UB, LÚ.GUB.BA, and LÚ.AL.È.DÈ, while the feminine form *maḥḥûtu* is identified with SAL.AL.È.DÈ.
- MSL 12.6.22. Two separate terms for “prophet” occur in ḤAR-gud B. The first: *raggimu*, is attested in line 134 with 𒌝LÚ.𒀭ŠABRA = *šabrû* (“dream interpreter”). The second: *maḥḥû*, is attested further down in line 147 as equivalent to LÚ.AN.NÉ.BA.TU = *eššebû* (“an ecstatic priest”).⁴⁸ Interestingly, the composite logogram LÚ.GUB.BA which, as shown above, usually represents *ma/muḥḥû*, is considered equivalent to *a[p]illû* = *ašša[xxx]* in line 135.

⁴⁴ S. Freedman, *If a City is Set on a Height: The Akkadian Omen Series Šumma ālu ina Mēlê Šakin: Vol. 1, Tablets 1–21* (OPFK 17; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1998) 32–35.

⁴⁵ E. Leichty, *The Omen Series Šumma izbu* (TCS 4; Locust Valley: Augustin, 1970) 131.

⁴⁶ Leichty, *Šumma izbu*, 230–31.

⁴⁷ Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 108. Not included in *Prophets and Prophecy*.

⁴⁸ CAD E 371, sub *eššebû*; AHW, *e/iššebû*, 258.

- Igituḥ.⁴⁹ Stökl notes that an entry in the lexical series IGI.DUḤ.A = *tāmartu* equates “prophet” (*maḥḥû*) with LÚ.GUB.BA (line 263).

Administrative texts with prophets:

- SAA 7 9 (K.8143+). In this list of lodgings for officials, a certain prophet (*raggimu*) is accommodated together with a chariot owner (*bēl mugirri*), a cohort commander of the crown prince (*rāb kišir mār šarri*), and a bodyguard of the queen mother (*ša-qurbūtu ummi šarri*) in the ‘residences’ (*mūšebi*) of the Dikanaeans.
- SAA 12 69. In obv. 27–31 of the decree of expenditures for ceremonies in the Aššur temple in Assur records that the brewers (*širāšû*) are to provide prophetesses (*maḥḥātu*) with one homer five seahs (of barley)⁵⁰ as a part of the “expenditure for the divine council” (*nadbāku ša puḥur ilāni*).
- ZT 13463.⁵¹ Stökl includes this recently published record of expenditures in his corpus of texts relating to prophecy.⁵² In this text, a prophet (*maḥḥû*) occurs alongside an augur (^{LÚ}*dāgil iṣṣūre*) and an unidentified temple as the recipient of a generous amount of copper by the city gate (obv. 1–3).

⁴⁹ For text, see B. Landsberger and O. R. Gurney, “igi-duḥ-a = *tāmartu*, short version,” *AfO* 18 (1957) 81–86. Not included in *Prophets and Prophecy*.

⁵⁰ Thus L. Kataja and R. Whiting, *Grants, Decrees and Gifts of the Neo-Assyrian Period* (SAA 12; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1995) 74.

⁵¹ Not included in *Prophets and Prophecy*. For text, see S. Parpola, “Cuneiform Texts from Ziyaret Tepe (Tušḫan), 2002–2003 (Plates I–XXV),” *SAAB* 17 (2008) 98–100. Whilst Parpola speculates that another occurrence of the term “prophet” may also be found in ZT 12084 (obv. 4’), this text shall not be included here. Parpola himself admits, the composite logogram as it appears here (𐎶𐎵*.GUB?) is incomplete (missing a final BA sign), moreover, the poorly preserved state of the tablet makes even this reconstruction only tentative.

⁵² Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 108.

5. Neo-Assyrian Prophetic Phenomenon.

In this chapter I will investigate the phenomenon of prophecy in the Neo-Assyrian sources applying the same seven categories as outlined earlier. Admittedly, these categories are adopted from our previous analysis of the phenomenon in the Mari sources, particularly the letters.¹ Rather than being procrustean, the categories themselves are sufficiently general and will ultimately prove helpful in our final synthesis (Chap. 8).

5.1 What Prompted Prophetic Oracles?

5.1.1 Prophecy and Prayer During a Crisis.

Whilst prophetic activity at Mari could be prompted in various ways,² the only unambiguous context for oracles among the Assyrian sources is in response to royal prayers uttered during a crisis.³ Several episodes illustrate this scenario:

5.1.1.1 Prophetic responses to royal prayers during the succession crisis of 681 B.C.E.

According to the historical prologue of the Nin. A inscription, the attempted usurpation by his older brothers in 681 B.C.E. had thrown the certainty of Esarhaddon's accession into disarray and forced him to withdraw from the Palace of Succession in Nineveh to the relative safety of exile.⁴ The following oracle refers to

¹ See section 2.3.

² See section 3.1.

³ It has also been suggested that prophecies could be acquired through consultation with a prophet—a point which will be subsequently addressed in 5.1.2.

⁴ RINAP 4 1: i 8–ii 11.

this displacement in a prophetic response to the prayer of Queen Naqia, wife of Sennacherib and mother of Esarhaddon:

SAA 9 1.8: v 13–22.

To the Mother of the King: Since you implored me (*maḥāru*) saying, “You have placed in your lap the one on the right *and* the one on the left, *yet* my own offspring you have caused to roam the steppel” Now, oh King, do not fear! The Kingship is yours! The power is yours!

According to Ištar, Naqia had appealed to the goddess, lamenting her son’s perilous circumstances. Reference to “The one on the right *and* the one on the left” (*ša imitti ša šumēli*) likely alludes to Esarhaddon’s rebellious two older brothers, one of which has been identified as Arda-Mulišši, the former crown prince displaced by Esarhaddon.⁵ That they have been placed in Ištar’s “lap” (*sūnu*) in contrast to Naqia’s son, Esarhaddon, who was now in exile “roaming the steppe” (*šēru rapādu*), indicates that at the time of her appeal Esarhaddon’s brothers had already gained the upper hand and were effectively exercising kingship—albeit an illegitimate one. In Ištar’s prophetic response, the goddess nails her colours to the mast, and, in an oracle ultimately addressed to Esarhaddon, declares to him “Yours is the kingdom! Yours is the power!”.

Queen Naqia was not the only royal voice to pray to the deities and so provoke a prophetic response during this turbulent period. According to the Nin. A inscription, the crown prince Esarhaddon himself made a desperate appeal while in exile:

RINAP 4 1: i 59–60.

I prayed (lit. “I raised my hands” *qātī ašši*) to Aššur, Sîn, Šamaš, Bēl, Nabû, Nergal, Ištar of Nineveh, (and) Ištar of Arbela.

⁵ On the historical circumstances surrounding Sennacherib’s death, including the identification of Arda-Mulišši as the murderer, and Esarhaddon’s eventual enthronement, see S. Parpola, “The Murderer of Sennacherib,” in *Death in Ancient Mesopotamia*, ed. B. Alster (CRRAI 26 = Mesop. 8; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980) 171–82.

Esarhaddon's appeal in the midst of the same bleak circumstances is also retrospectively narrated from Aššur's perspective in the opening lines of another oracle:

SAA 9 3.3: ii 10–14.

Now these traitors conspired against you, exiled you, and surrounded you; but you opened your mouth, "Hear me, O Aššur!" I heard your cry (*anāku killaka asseme*).

Admittedly, it is not obvious from either of these accounts that Esarhaddon's prayer had actually received a prophetic response. In what immediately follows, the inscription records Esarhaddon having received a response by extispicy,⁶ and, in the oracle, Aššur claims to have sent astronomical portents.⁷ On the other hand, there are two lines of evidence which make it fairly likely that Esarhaddon's appeal did prompt prophetic oracles as well. First, the Nin. A and Ass. A inscriptions both record that encouraging "prophetic messages" (*šipir maḥḥê*) were regularly received during this turbulent period.⁸ And second, there exists several oracles of Ištar which indicate the same historical circumstances as Esarhaddon's appeal and claim to have "heard" (*šemû*) him.⁹

- 1) In SAA 9 5: 3, Ištar refers to Esarhaddon, saying, "I heard *his* cry" (*ikkillu*)—a phrase which parallels Aššur's words in SAA 9 3.3 above. Moreover, in an indication that Esarhaddon was still in exile at the time of this prophetic

⁶ RINAP 4 1: i 60b–62. Despite answering Esarhaddon with a quotation of first-person divine speech, the inscription itself describes the episode as a *šir takilti* ("omen[s] of encouragement")—a term usually associated extispicy (Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 33–34). In this respect, its circumstances resemble that of the oracular answer given to Sennacherib's divinatory enquiry (*bīru šālu*) briefly quoted earlier in the inscription (RINAP 4 1: i 13–14).

⁷ SAA 9 3.3: ii 15–17. For a discussion of the "fiery glow from the gate of heaven" (*issu libbi abul šamê attaqallalla*) as an ominous sign portending the defeat of enemy, see Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, 24; *Letters from Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 68.

⁸ RINAP 4 1: i 6–7; 57: ii 12–17.

⁹ For a discussion the historical background of the prophetic oracle corpus and their relation to the royal inscriptions of Esarhaddon, see Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, LXVIII–LXXV; Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 14–34.

response, the goddess promises to “go out to the Palace of the Steppe” (l. 8) and “give Esarhaddon protection” (l. 9–10) from his enemies.

- 2) In SAA 9 1.2: ii 2’–3’, Ištar alludes to a prayer of Esarhaddon in the question: “What [...] I would not have heard you?” and refers to the period prior to Esarhaddon’s arrival and enthronement in Nineveh.
- 3) In SAA 9 6: 2–3, Ištar refers to the state of national upheaval prior to Esarhaddon’s victory, twice promising to “restore order” (*taqānu*), and, according to Hilber, that she will answer prayer with the phrase “I have heard...”¹⁰

All of this suggests that, besides other notable forms of divine response, prophecy played an important role in the matrix of human-divine communications during Esarhaddon’s exile and that it could be prompted by the prayers of the king as well as the intercession of other royal members on his behalf.

5.1.1.2 A prophetic response to Assurbanipal’s prayer during the Elamite crisis of 653 B.C.E.¹¹

According to the Asb. B inscription, Assurbanipal describes how, fearing an immanent attack by Tuemman, he turns to the goddess Ištar in her temple at Arbela and prays:

Asb. B: v 26.

...I implored Ištar the most high. I stood before her, I prostrated myself lower than her, and, with my tears flowing, I prayed to her divinity, saying, “O Lady of Arbela...”

Note that the king’s appeal (*maḥāru*) is actually a combination of actions, including: standing (*izuzzu*), kneeling/prostration (*kamāsu*), and tearful prayer (*dimtu + suppu*)—together describing his desperate and humbled state before the goddess.

¹⁰ Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy*, 68.

¹¹ For the 653 date of Assurbanipal’s conflict with Teumman, see Frame, *A Political History*, 122–23 n. 112; Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 383, 408.

Accordingly, Assurbanipal's venerations and lengthy prayer (lines 29–46) were not performed in vain but are followed by two brief but encouraging oracles from goddess:

Asb. B: v 46–49.

Ištar heard my despondent groans. “Do not fear,” she said *and* she encouraged me.

“Because of your lifted hand which you raised *and* your eyes which are filled with tears,
I have compassion for you.”

Despite there being no mention of an intermediary, Ištar's “hearing” of Assurbanipal's lament (lit. “despondent groans” *inḫī šūnuḫūti*) as well as her references to his “raised lifted hand” and “tear filled eyes” together indicate that the formulaic *Erhörungsorakel*¹² of the goddess was to be understood as an immediate divine response to the king's appeal.

A literary paraphrase of the same episode also occurs elsewhere:¹³

SAA 3 31: 14'–18'.

I opened my palms to the goddess Ištar, the lady of Arbela, saying, “I am Assurbanipal... why is Teumman falling upon me?” Ištar said to me: “I myself...”

The phrase *upnī petû* (“to open one's palms”) corresponds to Assurbanipal's “lifted hand” in Asb. B and, combined with the quotation of his utterance, refers to the prayer-act of the king. Ištar's response, though only partially preserved, completes the royal appeal–divine response structure.

5.1.1.3 Prophetic responses to Assurbanipal's prayers during the Babylonian rebellion of Šamaš–šumu–ukin.

The text SAA 3 13, more commonly known as *The Dialogue Between Assurbanipal and Nabû*, is a literary compilation best understood against the backdrop of the

¹² For this understanding of Ištar's prophetic reply, see Weippert, “Assyrische Prophetien,” 97–98; Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 53; “Fear Not: A Study on an Ancient Near Eastern Phrase,” in *Changing Face of Form Criticism For the Twenty-First Century*, eds. M. Sweeney and E. Ben Zvi (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 146–47.

¹³ For this designation, see Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 53.

internal crisis created by the Babylonian rebellion under the leadership of Assurbanipal's brother, Šamaš-šumu-ukin.¹⁴ As the title *Dialogue* implies, the Assyrian king and his deity appear together in this text as interlocutors. The king's prayerful comportment is described in this text in language already familiar from Asb. B and SAA 3 31. He is "prostrate upon his knees" (*kāmiš ina kinšēšu*) with "his palms stretched open" (*iptete upnišu*) in fervent prayer (Gtn Dur *maḥāru*).¹⁵ To these gestures, three separate episodes of direct speech record Assurbanipal's desperate and repeated appeals to Nabû.¹⁶

According to the anonymous narrator, Nabû "responds" (*apālu*) to Assurbanipal¹⁷ and oracles of prophetic reassurance accompany each of the king's three appeals.¹⁸ Nabû says to Assurbanipal, "do not fear" (*lā tapallah*) in formulaic words already familiar from Ištar in the Asb. B inscription.¹⁹ In contrast to the king's distress that he will be murdered,²⁰ Nabû promises "I will give you long life (and) pleasant winds I will appoint with your life."²¹ And finally, in response to Assurbanipal's fear of being abandoned to his "ill-wishers" (*ḥaddānu*),²² the king's "enemies" (*bēl šassu*),²³ Nabû reassures him that "your ill-wishers...like springtime

¹⁴ Although Parpola considers the Tuemman attack as the probable context for this scene, he recognizes that SAA 3 13 and SAA 9 9 were written and edited by the same scribe and that both texts share many affinities. He also acknowledges that they likely arise out of the same historical situation, namely, in the midst of the Šamaš-šumu-ukin rebellion—the most tenuous period of Assurbanipal's reign (Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, LXXI). For further discussion of this text, see Atkinson, "Prophecy in K1285?" 59–89.

¹⁵ SAA 3 13: 3, 9, 14–16, 18–19, r. 1.

¹⁶ SAA 3 13: 1–6; 20–22; r. 2–5.

¹⁷ SAA 3 13: 23.

¹⁸ SAA 3 13: 7–18; 24–26; r. 6–11.

¹⁹ SAA 3 13: 24.

²⁰ SAA 3 13: 2 *lā ittanakšadū napšātiya* "May my life not be destroyed."

²¹ SAA 3 13: 24–25 *napšāti arkāti addanakka šārī ṭābī issi*^{*1} *napšātika apaqqid*.

²² SAA 3 13: 2, 6, 22, r. 3–4. For this term, see CAD H 23; sub *ḥādī'ānu*; AHW, *ḥaddānu*, 307.

²³ SAA 3 13: r. 5.

insects will be crushed before your feet.”²⁴ Consequently, the structure of royal appeal–divine response is demonstrated not only by the text’s dialogic format but also in Nabû’s acknowledgement of Assurbanipal’s distress and the reuse of his vocabulary.

5.1.1.4 Summary.

All of this points to the image that during crises—especially major ones—prophecy could be prompted by the prayers of the king and the intercession of other royal personages on his behalf. Prophets remain largely unmentioned in most of the above sources such that the relationship between the royal suppliant and the responding deity appears virtually immediate and unmediated. In reality, however, it is doubtful that suppliant-deity communications were ever so direct. The inclusion of the prophet’s name in the individual oracle reports of Esarhaddon make it almost certain that prophetic responses were delivered by a human intermediary. On the other hand, whether or not royal prayers required any mediation for them to be delivered to the deities remains an issue under discussion and will be addressed next.

5.1.2 Prophecy and Consultation with a Prophet.

In addition to being prompted by prayer, it has been claimed that oracles could also be given in response to consulting prophets. As evidence of this practice, Parpola points to SAA 10 294,²⁵ which he renders as follows:

SAA 10 294: r. 31–32

I turned to a prophet (but) did not find any hope, he was adverse and did not see much.

Parpola is followed by Nissinen,²⁶ Pongratz-Leisten,²⁷ and Hilber²⁸—all of whom present this passage as evidence for the practice of consulting prophets for personal

²⁴ SAA 3 13: r. 9–10 *haddânūtēka kī burbillātē ša pān šatti untatarruqū ina maḥar šēpēka*.

²⁵ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVII, CIV n. 243.

affairs. Yet this interpretation is problematic, not least but because there is no clear evidence that the prophet was consulted. The text immediately following *raggimu*, at the start of line 32, has been broken away leaving the precise role of the prophet ambiguous.²⁹ Nor is there any reference to an oracle in the passage. Moreover, de Jong has recently demonstrated that Parpola's interpretation of *diglu untatti* along divinatory lines as well as his linking of the phrase with the prophet are both based on a misconception and should be translated differently.³⁰

The same criticisms can also be leveled against claims of prophetic consultation inferred from the references to prophets in two other texts: SAA 7 9 and 10 109. Regarding the first, Parpola and Nissinen have each proposed that prophets were members of the military divinatory apparatus who accompanied the army on campaigns and could be called upon to provide oracles.³¹ The text itself, however, makes no comment on the official role of Quqî beyond that he was a *raggimu*;³² nor is there any mention of an oracle or that he could be consulted. As for SAA 10 109, Hilber interprets the "summoning" (*rēša našû*) of prophets and prophetesses on the obverse in line 9' to mean that they had been brought to the royal court by the king so he could inquire after divine revelations.³³ Yet, the precise function of the prophets while at court as well as the king's purposes in bringing

²⁶ Nissinen *References to Prophecy*, 84–88.

²⁷ Pongratz-Leisten, *Herrschaftswissen*, 80–81.

²⁸ Hilber, *Cultic Prophets*, 69.

²⁹ De Jong (*Isaiah*, 293) points out that *raggimu* is connected to what precedes it, so that the prophet is related to the rejection of Urad-Gula at the palace.

³⁰ De Jong, *Isaiah*, 292–94.

³¹ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, CIV n. 243; Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 65.

³² Not ignoring the references to military personnel, nevertheless, de Jong more broadly concludes that the text "mentions a prophet among royal employees" and that "apparently a prophet could serve in a royal office" (idem, *Isaiah*, 301).

³³ Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy*, 54 n. 12, 65.

them there are left unexplained;³⁴ certainly, at least, the letter gives no record of an inquiry by the king nor does it mention that he had received any divine speech.

In all, although it cannot be excluded that the practice of consulting prophets for divine messages may have occurred, there currently is no clear evidence of this practice.

5.1.3 Summary.

In the Neo-Assyrian sources, the only unambiguous means by which prophetic oracles may be prompted appears to be in response to royal entreaties. In their oracles, the deities make clear references to having “heard” the king’s prayers and acknowledge his distress, they refer to his supplicatory comport and, in their divine utterances, they even adopt some of the king’s own vocabulary so as to reassure him. It is not so clear, however, if prophecy could be prompted by consulting a prophet. Of the three texts typically advanced as evidence for this means (SAA 10 109, 294; 7 9), none present an unambiguous image, but rely more upon inference than actually demonstrate prophetic consultation.

5.2 Prophets in the Neo-Assyrian Sources.

5.2.1 Terminology.

Two terms denote those associated with prophetic activity in the Neo-Assyrian period: *maḥḥû* and *raggimu*.

5.2.1.1 The *maḥḥû*.

Already familiar from the previous discussion on prophets at Mari,³⁵ personnel identified by the title *maḥḥû* are attested in various contexts from the Neo-Assyrian

³⁴ De Jong (*Isaiah*, 197 n. 293) disputes Parpola’s rendering of the text and argues against it being cited as evidence that prophets were summoned to the king for the purpose of prophetic service. Instead, he suggests that Bel-ušeziḥ’s complaint is that the king should “pay attention to” the prophetic messages he had previously received regarding the reconstruction of Babylon.

³⁵ See above section 3.2.1.1.

period.³⁶ Included among these is the oracle report SAA 9 10 on the grounds that it attests the logogram MÍ.GUB.BA,³⁷ which typically denotes *maḥḥûtu*³⁸ and is associated with Dunnaša-amur, the purported prophetic speaker of SAA 9 9.³⁹

Despite the wide variety of attestations in the Neo-Assyrian period, nevertheless insight into the “ecstatic” character of *maḥḥû* is still somewhat vague. As at Mari, the title *maḥḥû* is also often associated with the ecstatic *zabbû*,⁴⁰ though in Neo-Assyrian lexical lists, attestations of *muḥḥû* also occur alongside a number of other cult functionaries, including the *lallaru* (“wailers”).⁴¹ Echoing the latter, in ritual and literary texts *maḥḥû* are reported to “cry/weep” (*bakû*)⁴² and “wail” (*damāmu*)⁴³ as well as become “(adversely) affected” (*nalputu*)⁴⁴—in each case reflecting the expression of strong emotion through negative outbursts. Consistent with this image are the Neo-Assyrian occurrences of the related term *maḥḥûtiš* (“to

³⁶ K.8204: 7; MSL 12.4.212: 213; 12.4.222: 116–19; 12.6.22: 147; 12.6.32: 14; 17.4.3: 169; SAA 2 6: 117; 3 23: 5'; 3 34: 28 = 3 35: 31; 12 69: 29; *Šumma ālu* I: 101–02; *Šumma izbu* XI: 7. In royal inscriptions, the appellative occurs as the *nomen rectum* in the construct chain *šipir maḥḥê* (“messages of the prophets”) which refers to instances of divine encouragement and exhortation received by the king. For a discussion of these occurrences, see below under section 5.2.4.

³⁷ SAA 9 10: s. 1.

³⁸ Contra Parpola (*Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVI), who argues MÍ.GUB.BA should be read as *raggintu* on the spurious reasoning that *maḥḥû*, being “conspicuously absent from purely Neo-Assyrian texts” and “restricted to literary use,” was “replaced” by *raggimu* in colloquial use. Note, however, the attestation of *maḥḥûtu* in a Neo-Assyrian Decree of Expenditures for Ceremonies in the Aššur Temple in Assur (SAA 12 69) as well as the association of LÚ.GUB.BA with the masculine form *maḥḥû* on Tablet IV of the Neo-Assyrian Canonical Series LÚ = ša (MSL 12 4.222: 116–17). The latter corresponds with two earlier Old Babylonian lexical entries that explicitly list the feminine form (MSL 12 5.22: 23–24; 5.32: 26–27).

³⁹ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, IL–L, 41.

⁴⁰ LTBA 2 1: vi 41–44 (dupl. LTBA 22: 378; K.4193: r. 5); MSL 12.4.212:213–14; 222:116–121; 17.4.3:169; note also their appearance together in line 31 of the Ritual of Ištar and Dumuzi (Farber, *Beschwörungsrituale*, 129, 141, 161–62).

⁴¹ MSL 12.4.212: 212–13.

⁴² SAA 3 34: 28 = 35: 31.

⁴³ SAA 3 23: 5.

⁴⁴ K.8204: 7.

act like a female *maḥḥû*”)⁴⁵ as well as *maḥû*, the verb upon which the nominal form *maḥḥû* is based.⁴⁶ All of this seems to suggest that so-called “ecstatics” as well as those who acted like them were probably marked by frenetic displays of intense emotion in the Neo-Assyrian period similar to their counterparts at Mari.

5.2.1.2 The *raggimu*.

The prophetic appellative *raggimu* (fem. *raggintu*) is unique to the Neo-Assyrian period.⁴⁷ It is attested in royal correspondence,⁴⁸ a succession treaty,⁴⁹ administrative and lexical lists,⁵⁰ as well as in the colophons of several oracles.⁵¹

Parpola has argued the *raggimu* were characterized by a public role, whereby they acted as “speakers to the masses” rather than to single individuals.⁵² As much is initially suggested by the term’s etymology, where the nominal form may be literally translated “crier/proclaimer” on the basis that it is derived from *ragāmu*,⁵³ a verb held to mean “to shout/proclaim.”⁵⁴ Moreover, the verb *ragāmu* itself occurs in several texts associated with the activity of *raggimu*/*raggintu* by introducing first

⁴⁵ RINAP 4 1: i 73; Enuma Elish IV: 88; K.225+: 151 (for text see, W. Lambert, “Three Literary Prayers of the Babylonians,” *AfO* 19 (1959/60) 47–55); Asb. A: i 84; see also the reconstruction by A. Fuchs of the Ištar Temple Inscription (line 159) “The terrible splendor of the weapons of Aššur my lord overwhelmed him, he became hysterical and bit his hands in despair.” (*apud* Borger, *Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, 287).

⁴⁶ RINAP 4 1: i 41 “Afterwards, my brothers went hysterical...”; note also MSL 15.3.1.2: 208 where *maḥû* occurs alongside *šegû* (“to be wild, to rave”) and *šalû* (“to fling [oneself] down”).

⁴⁷ CAD R 67, sub *raggintu* and *raggimu*.

⁴⁸ SAA 10 109: 9'; 10 294: r. 31; 10 352: e. 23, r. 1; 13 37: 7.

⁴⁹ SAA 2 6 §10: 116.

⁵⁰ SAA 7 9: r. i 23 (Lodging List of Officials); MSL 12.6.22: 134.

⁵¹ SAA 9 3: iv 31; 9 6: r. 11e; 9 7: 1.

⁵² Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecy*, XLV.

⁵³ The term *raggimu* is generally considered to be a nominal PARRIS form (GAG³ §55 M) based on the verb *ragāmu* to form an agent noun that, in contrast to the participle, reflects a permanent quality. See N. Kouwenberg, *Gemination in the Akkadian Verb* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica 33; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1997) 58–61; M. Weippert, “‘König, fürchte dich nicht!’ assyrische Prophetie im 7. Jahrhundert v. Chr (review of Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*),” *Or* 71 (2002) 33 n. 130. Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, CII n. 212.

⁵⁴ CAD R 62–67, sub *ragāmu*.

person divine speech.⁵⁵ This indicates that oracles were not uttered discreetly but were probably broadcast loudly.

As much is commensurate with the activity of prophets in the royal correspondence as well as several oracles. In SAA 10 352 a *raggintu* shouts (*ragāmu*) in “the assembly of the country,” while SAA 10 24 appears to refer to an episode of prophecy which took place outdoors in a public place. Likewise, the oracle SAA 9 2.4 addresses the “multitudes” saying, “Sunrise and sunset, listen carefully!,” and SAA 9 3.2, apparently attributed to a *raggimu*,⁵⁶ collectively summons “Assyrians, listen carefully!” Taken together, these examples seem to concur that the *raggimu* (*raggintu*), as their title suggests, were known for their loud outbursts of purportedly divine speech toward collective audiences.

5.2.1.3 Relation between *mahḥû* and *raggimu*.

As to the how the *mahḥû* and *raggimu* relate, discussions have generally focused on the extent to which the two titles overlap. Parpola denies that there existed any real difference between the *mahḥû* and *raggimu*.⁵⁷ Arguing that by the Neo-Assyrian period there is only a divergent pattern of occurrences between them, he suggests that the term *mahḥû* had become a literary archaism already supplanted in common parlance by *raggimu*. Thus, notwithstanding the terminological difference between the two titles—which he accounts for along diachronic lines—Parpola claims that the prophetic roles and functions of the *mahḥû* and *raggimu* were actually “synonymous.” In contrast, Pierre Villard claims that a difference

⁵⁵ Occurrences identifying a *raggintu* include: SAA 10 352: e. 23; 13 37: 10. In addition, SAA 9 6: 12e and 13 144: 7 though badly damaged, they too probably included references to a *raggimu* and *raggintu*, respectively (see Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, 35).

⁵⁶ Note the tablet’s colophon in SAA 9 3.5: r. 11e–12e.

⁵⁷ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLV–XLVI.

between the two terms can be observed.⁵⁸ He argues that, while *maḥḥû* served as a general Akkadian term for “prophet,” *raggimu* was actually more specialized, referring specifically to “des prophètes reconnus, que l’on pouvait si nécessaire consulter pour interroger un dieu.”⁵⁹

Both views, however, are somewhat problematic. In contrast to Parpola’s argument, clear evidence does exist of both titles contemporaneously used in identical contexts. Indeed, *maḥḥû* and *raggimu* occur side-by-side in the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon (SAA 2 6) as even Parpola himself acknowledges. Moreover, the titles are attested together in two Neo-Assyrian administrative documents,⁶⁰ a situation which not only demonstrates that *maḥḥû* remained in active use alongside *raggimu*,⁶¹ but that both terms overlapped in regards to the literary contexts where they might be employed. Alternatively, the examples of *raggimu* that Villard cites may suggest their capacity for consultation,⁶² even as was discussed earlier. Yet to assert that between the two titles a distinction exists, especially one as clear as Villard supposes, seems somewhat overstated. Both terms are attested in contexts that either allude to oracles given in response to solicitation, or, as is more common, leave their circumstances unmentioned.⁶³ Thus, it is not at all clear how Villard can be sure that the *raggimu*—in contrast to the *maḥḥû*—gave only solicited oracles, or, that the *maḥḥû*—in contrast to the *raggimu*—could also utter unsolicited ones; propositions otherwise necessary to sustain Villard’s distinctions.

Notwithstanding Parpola’s failure to fuse them together, there is still sufficient evidence to indicate that the *maḥḥû* and *raggimu* overlapped. Both terms

⁵⁸ P. Villard, “Les Prophéties à l’Époque Néo-Assyrienne,” in *Prophètes et rois: Bible et proche-orient*, ed. A. Lemaire (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001) 65–66.

⁵⁹ Villard, “Les Prophéties,” 66.

⁶⁰ For *maḥḥû*, see SAA 12 69: 29; *raggimu* SAA 7 9: r. 23.

⁶¹ A point also observed by Weippert, “König,” 33.

⁶² Villard refers to SAA 10 109, 294; 7 9. However, these are not unambiguous. See above 5.1.2.

⁶³ For examples of solicitation with *maḥḥû*, see above 5.1.1.

identify personnel responsible for the delivery of first person divine speech,⁶⁴ both can occur as individuals or in groups,⁶⁵ both are associated with temples,⁶⁶ and their contiguous attestation in SAA 2 6 suggests that, along with *šā'ilu*, they are both “specialists in non-inductive divinatory methods.”⁶⁷ Yet, *maḥḥû* and *raggimu* do appear to differ, though not in the same way as Villard suggests. For, whereas the *maḥḥû* participate in cultic rituals and are associated with frenetic behaviour (so-called “ecstaticism”) there is no evidence that the same was also true for *raggimu*.⁶⁸ It is tempting to suggest that *maḥḥû* and *raggimu* were intermediaries whose respectively characteristic techniques and cultic roles meant that, despite their functional overlap, they reflect separate prophetic categories distinguishable by their contemporaries. For the modern scholar, however, the uncertain image of the prophet’s comport or cultic responsibilities—a result of the paucity of evidence available to us—cautions against maintaining this differentiation too rigidly.⁶⁹

In any event, *maḥḥû* and *raggimu* were not always distinguished, even by their contemporaries. For, despite the absence of either title in the oracle collections SAA 9 1 and 9 2 as well as the report SAA 9 9, the named intermediaries in these texts were undoubtedly *maḥḥû* or *raggimu*. Indeed, Dunnaša-amur of SAA 9 9 as well as La-dagil-ili of SAA 9 1.10 and 2.3 occur in these contexts without a prophetic title even though elsewhere they are attested with one.⁷⁰ Thus, whatever the distinctives between *maḥḥû* and *raggimu*, apparently these were of less significance to their

⁶⁴ For *maḥḥû*: SAA 3 34=35; 9 9, 10. For *raggimu*: SAA 9 3.5, 6, 7; 10 352; 13 37.

⁶⁵ For discussion and examples, see 5.2.3.

⁶⁶ See discussion below 5.4.5.

⁶⁷ Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 161.

⁶⁸ De Jong, *Isaiah*, 222. On the attestation of the *maḥḥû* in cultic rituals, note their role in the Marduk Ordeal (SAA 3 34=35) and the Ritual of Ištar and Dumuzi (Farber, 1977 A II a).

⁶⁹ Thus, de Jong wisely concludes that “we should refrain from either completely identifying *maḥḥû* and *raggimu*, or drawing a sharp distinction between them” (idem, *Isaiah*, 223).

⁷⁰ SAA 9 10: s.1–2 and 9 3.5: iv 31, respectively.

recorders than was the responsibility of specifying the names of the intermediaries involved⁷¹ or reproducing the oracles they spoke.⁷²

5.2.2 Prophets and Gender.

Important basic information, such as their gender, name, and location, is known for as many as sixteen prophetic intermediaries. Including the two individuals already mentioned above, this information can be outlined as follows:

Text(s).	M/F.	Name.	Translation of Name.	Location.
SAA 9 1.8	F	<i>Aḫāt-abīša</i>	“Sister of her father”	Arbela
SAA 9 1.4	F	<i>Bāia</i>	“The desired one” ⁷³	Arbela
SAA 9 9, 10	F	<i>Dunnaša-āmur</i>	“I have seen her power” ⁷⁴	Arbela
SAA 9 1.5	F	<i>Ilūssa-āmur</i>	“I have seen her godhead”	Assur ⁷⁵
SAA 9 1.7	F	<i>Issār-bēli-daʿʿini</i>	“Ištar, strengthen my lord!”	Unknown
SAA 13 37	F	<i>Mullissu-abi-ušri</i>	“O Mullissu, protect the father!” ⁷⁶	Assur (?) ⁷⁷
SAA 9 7	F	<i>Mullissu-kabtāt</i>	“Mullissu is honoured”	Unknown ⁷⁸
SAA 9 1.3	F	<i>Rēmūtti-Allati</i>	“Granted by Allatu (i.e., Ereškigal)” ⁷⁹	Dara-ḫuya, a mountain town
SAA 9 1.2, 2.5	F	<i>Sinqīša-āmur</i>	“I have seen her distress”	Arbela
SAA 9 2.4	F	<i>Urkittu-šarrat</i>	“Urkittu (i.e., Ištar of Uruk) is queen”	Calah
SAA 9 1.1	M	<i>Issār-lā-tašiyat</i>	“Do not neglect Ištar!”	Arbela
SAA 9 1.10, 2.3, 3.1-5	M	<i>Lā-dāgil-ili</i>	“The one who does not see God”	Arbela
SAA 9 2.1	M	[Nabû]-ḫussanni	“[Nabû,] remember me!” ⁸⁰	Assur

⁷¹ Contra Parpola, who considers the absence of titles in these collections as “superfluous in the context,” the occurrence of *raggimu* in the oracle collection SAA 9 3 suggests otherwise. Parpola makes no attempt to explain the absence of *maḥḥû* in SAA 9 9.

⁷² Note, however, the absence of any reference to a prophetic intermediary in SAA 3 13; 9 8; 10 111, 174, 284; 13 43, 139, 144; or with any of the oracles quoted in Assurbanipal’s royal inscriptions. On the purpose for a text’s mentioning of an intermediary, see my discussion in “Prophecy in K1285?” 78–79 n. 110.

⁷³ PNA B-G 253, sub *Bāia*.

⁷⁴ Weippert (“assyrische Prophetie,” 34) suggests reading *Dunqaša-āmur* “I have seen her goodness.”

⁷⁵ Literally: *Libbālāyu*.

⁷⁶ PNA L-N 765, sub *Mullissu-abu-ušri*.

⁷⁷ For this interpretation, see: Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 78; Parpola, *Letters From Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 329.

⁷⁸ Parpola suggests Nineveh on the grounds that “Mullissu” occurs in both the name of the prophetess as well as her oracle.

⁷⁹ Parpola (*Assyrian Prophecies*, LI, CVI n. 269) notes that Allatu was one of several appellatives of Ereškigal, the goddess of the netherworld on the basis of CT 25 4:24 and 8:8.

SAA 9 6	M	<i>Tašmetu-ereš</i>	“Tašmetu desired”	Arbela
SAA 7 9	M	<i>Quqî</i>	Uncertain meaning ⁸¹	Unknown
SAA 10 24	M	<i>Bēl-erība</i>	“Bel (the Lord) has replaced” ⁸²	Unknown

The gender distribution of the personnel listed here indicates that references to prophetesses outnumber their male counterparts by a ratio of about two to one. As to whether the disproportionate number of female prophets amounts to a general feminization of the prophetic role,⁸³ the data is not unambiguous. Most of the prophets listed above occur in the context of the oracle collections, the precise purpose and background of which is largely unknown. Moreover, if the multiple oracles attributed to individual prophets are taken into account, then, despite the apparent numeric superiority of female prophets, roughly an equal amount of oracles is attested for both genders.

Alternatively, Parpola considers that a feminization of Assyrian prophecy is indicated by the presence of several supposedly transgendered male prophets: Issar-la-tašiyat, Baia, and Ilussa-amur.⁸⁴ According to Parpola, Issar-la-tašiyat was originally preceded by a female determinative (MÍ) only to be crudely overwritten with the male (DIŠ) and divine (DINGIR) determinatives by a scribe who, being uncertain of the prophet’s actual gender, had apparently “changed his mind.”⁸⁵ Baia, on the other hand, is clearly preceded by a female determinative but is followed by

⁸⁰ On this restoration, see Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecy*, LI.

⁸¹ For the suggestion that *Quqî* be understood as an onomatopoeic name of West Semitic origin, see Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 64; PNA P-Š 1018, sub *Quqî*.

⁸² PNA B-G (1999) 296, sub *Bēl-erība*.

⁸³ As suggested by B. Pongratz-Leisten, “Cassandra’s Colleagues: Prophetesses in the Neo-Assyrian Empire,” *CSMSJ* 1 (2006) 23-29.

⁸⁴ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecy*, XXXIV, IL, XCVI n. 138. See also Nissinen, “Socioreligious Role,” 94, 110.

⁸⁵ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecy*, 5. Nissinen, evidently less certain of Parpola’s explanation, maintains the possibility that the emendation is either “an error of the scribe or indicates uncertainty about the gender of the prophet” (idem, “Socioreligious Role,” 94 n. 26).

DUMU.URU.*arba-il*, which may be literally translated: “a son of Arbela.”⁸⁶ A similar incongruity apparently also exists for *Ilussa-amur*. According to Parpola’s edition, *Ilussa-amur*, which is likewise preceded by a female determinative, is subsequently described as a URU.ŠÀ—URU-*a-a*, an otherwise masculine form of the gentilic “(male) Arbelite.”

Parpola interprets such scribal equivocations and incongruities to indicate that these prophets were understood by their peers to belong to a third gender. These otherwise male prophets, he argues, were probably self-castrates—feminized devotees of Ištar—similar to their contemporaries the *assinnu* and *kurgarrû*, cultic personnel who are described in the Poem of Erra as men “whose manhood Ištar changed to womanhood to strike awe into the people.”⁸⁷

Despite its popular acceptance,⁸⁸ however, Parpola’s analysis of the data is not without some serious doubts. According to Edzard, *Issar-la-tašiyat* already represents a clear masculine form of the name.⁸⁹ Thus, even if there is a conflation of signs preceding the prophet’s name,⁹⁰ it seems unlikely that this was due to any supposed scribal uncertainty over the prophet’s gender.

⁸⁶ Parpola also attributes SAA 9 2.2 to Baia, arguing that the oracle shares similar content with SAA 9 1.4. As a consequence, he proceeds to reconstruct the prophet’s name despite considerable damage to the colophon obliterating all but a final A sign, which is itself damaged (idem, *Assyrian Prophecies*, IL, 15).

⁸⁷ Cagni, “Poem of Erra,” 110–1, Tablet IV: 55–56. For this translation, see BM³, 94.

⁸⁸ Stökl’s (*Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 122 n. 63) recent comment that “the current consensus is very much that gender ambiguity is a central part of ancient Near Eastern prophecy” seems a little overstated. As far as I can tell, only Nissinen and Huffmon have accepted this interpretation. Yet, even the latter seems ambivalent to the issue of gender transgression among prophetic personnel outside of Mari or in the Neo-Assyrian period (idem, “A Company of Prophets,” 58).

⁸⁹ D. Edzard, “^mNingal-gāmil, ^rIštar-damqat: Die Genuskongruenz im akkadischen theophoren Personennamen,” ZA 55 (1962) 126. According to Edzard, the feminine form would be **Issār-lā-tašīṭṭi*.

⁹⁰ On the basis of his own collation, Weippert denies that there is any conflation of signs preceding *Issar-la-tašiyat* and that the gender determinative is, in fact, feminine not masculine (idem, “assyrische Prophetie,” 34).

Baia, in contrast, is neither an exclusively male nor female name.⁹¹

Nevertheless, that the preceding MÍ sign—an otherwise feminine marker in other occurrences of the name—is then followed by a masculine gentilic is not altogether surprising. As Kwasman comments, “very often a gentilic or common logogram was written without regard to the person involved.”⁹² Indeed, Akkadian is a Semitic language where the masculine form is occasionally written for the feminine gentilic by default.⁹³ On the other hand, because the expected feminine form of the gentilic DUMU.MÍ + GN is attested in two of the tablet’s other colophons,⁹⁴ the masculine form occurring here might simply be the result of scribal error, as Weippert has previously suggested.⁹⁵

Finally, with regard to Ilussa-amur, it is worth remembering that, due to the extensive damage along this column of the tablet, the suffix on the gentilic, which Parpola claims had marked it as a masculine form, is entirely reconstructed. According to Weippert, the line has sufficient room to alternatively restore the feminine form URU.ŠÀ.URU-a[-a-tú] (*libbāla[yyatu]*)⁹⁶ thereby eliminating any gender inconsistency between the determinative and gentilic as purported by Parpola.

Even as Parpola’s analysis of these prophets seems to be in question, thus so too is his interpretation that they represent a class of feminized or transgendered males. Instead, the prophets are to be understood, most likely, in accordance with

⁹¹ The name Baia is attested for both men and women. See PNA B-G (1999) 253, sub *Bāia*; also <http://homepage.univie.ac.at/heather.baker/pnaupdatebnames.html> accessed November 18, 2013.

⁹² T. Kwasman, “review of Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*,” *JQR* 92 (2001) 229.

⁹³ J. Hämeen-Anttila, *A Sketch of Neo-Assyrian Grammar* (SAAS 13; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2000) 84.

⁹⁴ See SAA 9 1.2: ii 9’-10’ and 9 1.8: v 24-25.

⁹⁵ Weippert, “assyrische Prophetie,” 34.

⁹⁶ Weippert, “assyrische Prophetie,” 33-34.

their respective determinatives: Issar-la-tašiyat as male, Baia and Ilussa-amur as female.

5.2.3 Prophetic Individuals versus Groups

The attestation of plural forms in several texts suggests that prophets and prophetesses could function in groups and were collectively active. Prophetesses (*maḥḥātu*) appear in SAA 12 69—a decree of expenditures—within a section outlining the expenditure for the divine assembly.⁹⁷ This attestation indicates that the prophetesses were, as a group, associated with the Aššur temple, and, importantly, that they participated in its ceremonies.⁹⁸ Group association with temples is also indicated by the appearance of “prophets and prophetesses... of the temple of Ištar” (*maḥḥu’ē maḥḥu’āte... ša bēt Iltār*) in an earlier food rations list from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, although, as is consistent with the text’s genre, no activity is reported.⁹⁹

Numerous references to individual prophets and prophetesses of “Arbela,” and, occasionally, the city of “Assur” in the colophons of the oracle collections SAA 9 1–2 suggests that despite being listed separately these oracles occurred at the same location during roughly the same period.¹⁰⁰ Prophets and prophetesses also occur together as a group of recipients of provisions in an apotropaic ritual of Ištar and Dumuzi.¹⁰¹

Finally, SAA 10.109, describes a situation in which prophets and prophetesses (*raggimānu, raggimātu*) are present in the royal court having been summoned by the

⁹⁷ SAA 12 69: 27–31.

⁹⁸ The result of which they received this patronage.

⁹⁹ VS 19 1: i 38’–39’ (for text, see H. Freydank, “Zwei Verpflegungstexte aus Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta,” *AoF* 1 [1974] 58–73). The important topic of the prophets’ association with the temple will be treated in greater detail below, under section 5.4.5.

¹⁰⁰ Parpola places these all during the period immediately before and after the enthronement of Esarhaddon (*idem, Assyrian Prophecies*, LXVIII–LXX.)

¹⁰¹ Farber, *Beschwörungsrituale*, 140–41, (comm. 161–62)

king. As to the precise nature of their activity, the text's author Bel-ušeziḫ does not explicitly say. Though far from being certain,¹⁰² Nissinen argues that the prophets' royal audience with the Assyrian king, so soon after his enthronement, was probably in accordance with the king's desire to receive additional divine messages by prophecy.¹⁰³

5.2.4 Prophets as “Messengers.”

Several sources indicate that Assyrian prophets were considered by their contemporaries as messengers of the deities. Both versions of the so-called Marduk Ordeal text,¹⁰⁴ explanatory texts of Assyro-Babylonian cult rituals,¹⁰⁵ claim as much. They designate the *maḥḥû* as the equivalent of a *mupassiru* (“deliverer of news”) and quote him in the presence of Ištar, the “Lady of Babylon,”¹⁰⁶ prophesying a lament to Bēl on her behalf.¹⁰⁷ An exceptionally rare title,¹⁰⁸ it is noteworthy that *mupassiru* is accompanied later in the same text by the double occurrence of its verbal root, *pussuru* (“to deliver news”), where it refers to the relaying of an utterance, albeit in this context by a divine intermediary.¹⁰⁹

The mediatory function of the prophets is also described in the royal inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Prophetic oracles in this context are denoted by the genitive chain *šipir maḥḥê* (“messages of the prophets”) which, as

¹⁰² See previous discussion 5.1.2.

¹⁰³ Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 94–95.

¹⁰⁴ T. Frymer-Kensky opines that “there is no ordeal in this composition” (idem, “The Tribulations of Marduk: The So-Called ‘Marduk Ordeal Text’,” *JAOS* 103 (1983): 131–41).

¹⁰⁵ A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea* (SAA 3; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989) XXIX.

¹⁰⁶ On this appellative of Ištar, see A. Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythical Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986) 224.

¹⁰⁷ Whilst the speaker remains unidentified (it is preceded only by the particle *mā*), in the context of a *maḥḥû*, it seems reasonable to interpret this episode of direct speech as prophetic and thus representing the deity. Despite concluding otherwise, Livingstone suggests as much of the exorcists in the previous line (idem, *Explanatory Works*, 224–25).

¹⁰⁸ CAD M/2 159, sub *mubassiru*.

¹⁰⁹ SAA 3 34: 58–60.

Nissinen notes,¹¹⁰ is analogous to the “message of the gods and Ištar” (*našparti ilāni u Ištar*) and “the unchanging message of Ištar, my lady” (*šipir Ištar bēliya ša lā innennū*).¹¹¹ Such parenthetical information serves to explain how, despite syntactically referring to the governing noun *maḥḥê* “prophets,” the *šipru* “messages” were actually understood to originate with the deities, in particular, the goddess Ištar. A votive inscription of Assurbanipal to Marduk makes this point even more explicit, removing reference to the prophetic intermediary altogether and denoting the direct speech of Marduk which follows as *šipir ilūtika* “your divine message.”¹¹²

5.2.5 Summary.

There are two titles to denote the personnel in Neo-Assyria who were prophetically active. The *maḥḥû* appear to have been characterized by frenetic displays of intense emotion such as wailing and crying, whereas the *raggimu* seem to have served in a public role, speaking to the masses, possibly shouting their message to larger audiences. Although only the *maḥḥû* are attested to have participated in cultic rituals, the two terms share a great deal of overlap, and, evidently, were often not distinguished by their contemporaries. In any case, a lack of evidence cautions against drawing too great of a distinction between the two terms.

Whilst attestations of female prophets greatly outnumber those of their male counterparts, the situation is probably due to the overrepresentation of female personnel in the oracle collections, rather than indicating a feminization of prophecy. Male and female prophets are active both as individuals or in a group. Prophets were acknowledged as functioning as messengers of the deities.

¹¹⁰ Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 134.

¹¹¹ RINAP 4 1: ii 6 and Asb. B v 79, respectively.

¹¹² K.120b+ (see Borger, *Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, 202).

5.3 Prophetic Deities in the Neo-Assyrian Sources.

5.3.1 Prophecy and the cult of Ištar in the Neo-Assyrian Sources.

As with the phenomenon at Mari, various deities are also active in Assyrian prophecy. Aššur, Ištar, Nabû, Sîn, and Marduk are all associated with oracles, the activity of prophets, or both. Of course, the appearance of these deities—key representatives of the Assyro-Babylonian pantheon—comes as little surprise. What is significant, however, is that the attestations of the goddess Ištar¹¹³ outnumber those of her male counterparts almost 3 to 1.¹¹⁴ Indeed, Ištar is the most commonly encountered speaking deity among oracles. She is exclusively responsible for as many as 30 oracles¹¹⁵ and appears alongside other deities in a couple more.¹¹⁶ In contrast, just twelve oracles are attributable to male deities.¹¹⁷ Prophets, on the other hand, are almost always associated with Ištar.¹¹⁸ How should we explain the disproportionate association of Assyrian prophecy with the goddess Ištar?

One explanation for her preponderance has been to consider the cult of Ištar as the locus of Assyrian prophecy. In his introduction to SAA 9, Parpola states that all prophetic oracles are “integral parts and products of...the ecstatic cult of Ištar”¹¹⁹ and that the Assyrian prophets “belonged to the community of devotees of Ištar.”¹²⁰

¹¹³ Ištar appears in her various manifestations: Banītu (the “Creatrix”), Bēlet Arbail (the “Lady of Arbela”), Bēlet Babili (the “Lady of Babylon”), Ištar of Arbela, Ištar of Nineveh, (Queen) Mullissu, Nanaya, Nikkal, Urkittu (the “Urukean”), Zarpanitu.

¹¹⁴ Deities are ambiguous or remain unidentified in the following: SAA 9 8; 10 199, 352; 13 144. Several other episodes are too badly damaged to be attributed to a deity with any confidence (SAA 9 1.7, 4, 10, 11).

¹¹⁵ Asb. A: iii 6–7, vi 113–115; Asb. B: v 47–49; SAA 3 31, 34 (=35); 9 1.1–3, 5–6, 8–10; 9 2.1–6; 9 3.4–5; 9 5–7, 9; 10 284; 13 148; 16 59: 4–14, 60: 5–9, 61: 4–9.

¹¹⁶ SAA 9 1.4; 10 24.

¹¹⁷ Aššur: SAA 9 3.1–3; 13 37. Marduk (inc. Bēl): SAA 10 111; 13 139; K.120B+ (Borger, *Inscriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, 202). Nabû (inc. Nusku): SAA 3 13: 7–18, 23–26, r. 6–11; 16 59: r. 2′–5′. Sîn: Asb. T: ii 33–35; SAA 10 174. Marduk and Nabû together: ABL 839 (Mattila, “Elam,” 28–29).

¹¹⁸ For notable exceptions, see the discussion below.

¹¹⁹ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XV.

¹²⁰ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVII.

To sustain these bold claims, Parpola refers to texts from both inside and outside the SAA 9 corpus which indicate numerous linkages between the cult of Ištar and Assyrian prophecy.¹²¹

As popular as this interpretation has been,¹²² it is not without its problems. To begin with, the corpus of material upon which Parpola relied was a limited one. By omitting key texts and selectively referring to others, prophecy's association with the cult of Ištar appears overstated. For example, whilst Parpola acknowledges the utterance of Queen Kidmuri in the royal inscriptions as evidence that "oracles contain references to the cult of the Goddess,"¹²³ he ignores the attestation of *amat Sîn* ("word of Sîn") in the passage immediately following.¹²⁴ Parpola also does not mention the oracles attributed to either Marduk (SAA 10 24, 111) or Sîn (SAA 10 174) despite his familiarity with them,¹²⁵ though he does point out the prophet at the Ištar temple in Calah (SAA 10 294) in a text of the very same collection.¹²⁶ Moreover, he refers to a *Middle-Assyrian* administrative list as evidence that male and female prophets were attached to the Ištar temple,¹²⁷ yet he neglects a *Neo-Assyrian*

¹²¹ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVII–XLVIII, CIV–CVI n. 238–257.

¹²² Parpola's view has been followed in several studies, most notably: K. Van der Toorn, "Mesopotamian Prophecy between Immanence and Transcendence: A Comparison of Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian Prophecy," in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, ed. M. Nissinen (SBLSymS 13; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 71–87; Nissinen, "Socioreligious Role," 95–102; Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy*, 53.

¹²³ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVII, CIV n. 240. For the episode, see Asb. T: ii 9–16.

¹²⁴ Asb. T: ii 31–44.

¹²⁵ Parpola has collated, edited, and commented on these texts in several publications which pre-date *Assyrian Prophecies*. See S. Parpola, *Letters From Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhadon and Assurbanipal. Part I: Texts* (AOAT 5; Kevelaer: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970) 18–19, 82–83 ; *Letters From Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 32–35, 100–01; *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (SAA 10; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993) 89–90.

¹²⁶ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVII, CIV n. 243.

¹²⁷ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVII, CV n. 244. For text, see Freydank, "Zwei Verpflegungstexte," 58–73.

administrative list that indicates prophetesses were attached to the Aššur temple (SAA 12 69)—a text on which he himself has previously commented.¹²⁸

Additionally, Parpola cites the Marduk Ordeal (SAA 3 34=35) as evidence that prophets “participated in cultic ceremonies” associated with Ištar,¹²⁹ and yet, he fails to indicate that the Akītu festival—to which these texts most likely refer—was held in Esaggil, the temple of Marduk in Babylon,¹³⁰ which suggests a prophetic domicile very different from that of the “three major cult centres of Ištar.”¹³¹ The same may also be said of his use of SAA 13 37,¹³² a text that he has previously claimed reflects the activity of a prophetess in Ešarra, the Aššur temple at Assur.¹³³

In all, Parpola’s selective use of the material available to him and his failure to account for the extent to which prophecy is associated with other deities, suggest that he exaggerates the link between Assyrian prophecy and the cult of Ištar, unnecessarily describing it in exclusive terms.

Nissinen on the other hand does address the evidence for prophecy’s association with deities other than Ištar.¹³⁴ However he not only accepts Parpola’s interpretation, he also seeks to apply it to several texts that Parpola avoids. Most notably, Nissinen claims that SAA 12 69 and 13 37 are two examples wherein female prophets “represented their patroness even in temples of other deities.”¹³⁵ Yet “their patroness” (i.e. Ištar) is almost completely absent from these texts. Indeed, in SAA 12 69 there is no mention of Ištar until the very end of the document, having no connection to the prophetesses who appear much earlier. As for SAA 13 37, the only

¹²⁸ See the apparatus entry for SAA 12 69: r. 18, 20–21.

¹²⁹ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVII.

¹³⁰ Livingstone, *Explanatory Works*, 232.

¹³¹ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVII.

¹³² Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLV, IL, CIII n. 214, CVI n. 259.

¹³³ Parpola, *Letters From Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 329. This text is discussed below.

¹³⁴ Nissinen, “Socioreligious Role,” 95–102.

¹³⁵ Nissinen, “Socioreligious Role,” 100.

explicit reference to Ištar is by the letter's author in his opening remarks, where Mullissu appears alongside the deities Aššur, Nabû, and Marduk as part of a formulaic greeting. Admittedly, the text does contain an implicit mention of the goddess with the attestation of an Ištar theophoric in the name of the prophetess Mullissu-abu-ušri ("O Mullissu, protect the father!"). Yet the frequent attestation of DN-*abu-ušur*¹³⁶ appellatives in the Neo-Assyrian prosopography rules out the possibility that it reflects either a particular "ideology of Ištar worship"¹³⁷ or that it should be construed as a so-called "prophetic name."¹³⁸

Whilst there is no evidence to associate these prophetesses with Ištar, there is clear evidence against it. As mentioned earlier, both of these texts have their origins in the Aššur temple at Assur, making it almost certain that the prophetesses were attached to Ešarra and associated with its divine patron—Aššur—not Ištar. Consequently, unless one accepts Nissinen's *a priori* assertion that all prophetic personnel "live under the aegis of the goddess,"¹³⁹ then SAA 12 69 and 13 37 actually contradict the idea that Assyrian prophets were exclusively attached to Ištar temples and demonstrate that some prophets were associated with other deities and attached to their temples.

In my view, everything points to the conclusion that Assyrian prophecy was not exclusively aligned with the cult of Ištar but was a broadly attested phenomenon, associated with a number of important state deities. Of course, this does not mean that the relationship between Ištar and Assyrian prophecy was not

¹³⁶ Whilst the verb *našāru* occurs in the name of the prophetess as the G-Stem preterite form (*ušri*), it is typically attested elsewhere as the imperative *ušur* ("protect"). In addition to occurring with other Ištar appellatives, this combination is attested with almost every other significant member of the Assyro-Babylonian pantheon, namely: Adad, Aššur, Bel, Inurta, Šamaš, Sin, as well as the lesser known Salmanu (for references, see PNA)

¹³⁷ Nissinen, "Socioreligious Role," 96.

¹³⁸ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVIII–LII. Cf. De Jong who disputes Parpola's examples and argues against the existence of peculiarly "prophetic" names (idem, *Isaiah*, 296–97 n. 61, 64).

¹³⁹ Nissinen, "Socioreligious Role," 95–96.

close. Indeed, several variations on the idea that the inordinate number of oracles associated with the goddess can be explained by such intimacy have been recently suggested.¹⁴⁰ Yet, in my view, these attempts are ultimately unconvincing and do not explain why Ištar is disproportionately represented among the various state deities associated with prophecy.

I prefer a more mundane explanation and suggest that Ištar's apparent prominence is due to the uneven distribution of texts and deities among the different sources for Assyrian prophecy. The largest single source for Assyrian prophecy is the oracle collections and reports of SAA 9. These mainly archival materials¹⁴¹ not only represent roughly half of all prophetic episodes that identify a deity, they also concentrate almost entirely upon the goddess. Indeed, in these materials all prophets are associated with Ištar and almost every oracle is attributed to her.¹⁴² Moreover, since Arbela is mentioned as the place of provenance for most of the oracles,¹⁴³ prophecy in this source may be said to be predominantly associated with the city's prominent Ištar manifestation, namely, Ištar of Arbela.

However, outside of the SAA 9 corpus, where occurrences of deities other than Ištar are much more numerous,¹⁴⁴ the picture looks very different. There, the association of prophecy with deities other than Ištar is roughly equal to that of the goddess. Only the cultic texts, as one would expect, unswervingly associate prophetic activity with the cult of Ištar. Otherwise, royal inscriptions,

¹⁴⁰ De Jong, Isaiah, 295–96; Pongratz-Leisten, “Cassandra’s Colleagues,” 26; Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 148.

¹⁴¹ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, LIII–LXII.

¹⁴² Notable exceptions include the three preliminary oracles of Aššur in SAA 9 3.1–3 as well as the utterances of Bel and Nabû alongside Ištar in SAA 9 1.4. Nevertheless, all of these oracles are widely attributed to prophets associated with Ištar.

¹⁴³ Out of 22 identifiable locations, Arbela is the origin for 18 prophetic episodes in this source (SAA 9 1.1–2, 4, 6, 8–10; 9 2.2–3; 9 3, 5–6, 9–10).

¹⁴⁴ Less than a quarter of male deities associated with prophecy occur among the archival materials in SAA 9, the remaining attestations are primarily in the royal correspondence and other sources.

administrative, and even literary sources, all present prophecy as more or less an activity which can be aligned with any state deity. In fact, within the royal correspondence, there is an imbalance in the other direction, as the number of oracles uttered by male deities slightly outnumbers those attributed to the goddess.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, in contrast to the dominance of Ištar of Arbela in the archival materials of SAA 9, within the correspondence there is a proliferation of the goddess's alternative manifestations that roughly correlates with the location of the letter's provenance.

5.3.2 Summary.

In summary, the ubiquity of Ištar in the sizeable SAA 9 corpus, in addition to her frequent occurrence among other sources, creates the appearance that Assyrian prophecy is predominantly associated with the goddess and her cult. As we have seen, however, this impression is likely to be skewed and is the result of the uneven distribution of deities among the sources. Notably the prevalence of Ištar and relative absence of male deities among archival materials despite their more equal representation in most other Assyrian sources for prophecy. Consequently, instead of seeking to ask why prophecy is disproportionately associated with the goddess, it may be more appropriate to consider the close proximity between the cult of Ištar and the prophetic archival material—or perhaps even more so—her cult's association with the scribal processes which produced them.

¹⁴⁵ Altogether, only four letters associate prophetic episodes exclusively with Ištar (SAA 10 284; 13 148; 16 60, 61), six with male deities (ABL 839; SAA 10 111, 174, 199; 13 37, 139), and 2 attest oracles from both the goddess and her male counterpart (SAA 10 24, 16 59).

5.4 Location of Prophecy.

5.4.1 Assyrian Heartland: The “Four Doorjambs.”

Most attestations of prophetic activity have their geographic provenance in the “four doorjambs of Assyria”—a phrase which occurs twice in SAA 9 3¹⁴⁶ and refers to the four main urban centres of the Assyrian heartland: Assur, Nineveh, Kalḫu, and Arbela,¹⁴⁷ all of which were important cult centres and boasted major temple complexes.

5.4.1.1 Arbela.

Arbela is clearly the city most frequently associated with Assyrian prophecy. Indeed, almost all of the prophets which occur among the colophons of the collections and reports are identified as being “Arbelites,”¹⁴⁸ and their oracles, by implication,¹⁴⁹ as having been uttered in Egašankalamma, the Ištar temple there.¹⁵⁰ The *šēlūtu* (“votaress”) of the fragmentary letter SAA 13 148 is identified with the temple at Arbela, as possibly is also her counterpart of an otherwise “unknown domicile” in SAA 9 1.5.¹⁵¹ Arguably, Egašankalamma is also the context for SAA 13 144¹⁵² and 139,¹⁵³ two letters with prophetic quotations by temple personnel.

¹⁴⁶ SAA 9 3: iii 20, iv 15.

¹⁴⁷ On the phrase, see CAD S 303, sub *sippu*; CAD K 176, sub *kapāpu*; Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, 26; and, especially, M. Nissinen, “City as Lofty as Heaven: Arbela and Other Cities in Neo-Assyrian Prophecy,” in *Every City Shall Be Forsaken*, eds. L. Grabbe and R. Haak (JSOTSup 330; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) 186–88.

¹⁴⁸ SAA 9 1.1–4, 6, 8–10; 9 2.2–3; 9 3.5; 9 5–6, 9–10. On the gentilic associated with the prophets in these texts, see Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, LXIII–LXIV; GAG³ §56.

¹⁴⁹ Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy*, 55.

¹⁵⁰ For the Egašankalamma temple, see George, *House Most High*, 90 #351.

¹⁵¹ Parpola (*Assyrian Prophecy*, L) suggests that this prophetess was probably from Arbela.

¹⁵² For the identification of this letter with Arbela, see Cole and Machinist, *Letters from Priests*, 116–17, and especially the comments of K. Radner in the footnotes of SAA 13 144 and 145.

¹⁵³ Cole and Machinist give no explanation for identifying the domicile of Aššur-ḫamatu^a and the origin of his letters (SAA 13 138–42) with Arbela. Radner follows B. Menzel (*Assyrische Tempel: Bd. 1, Untersuchungen zu Kult, Administration und Personal* [Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981] 10, 245) and identifies the author as a “priest or other high functionary of the temple of Ištar of Arbela” (PNA A 186–87, sub Aššur-ḫamatu^a). M. Nissinen and S. Parpola consider the provenance of the letter to be

Moreover, Assurbanipal twice claims in his royal inscriptions to have been sent prophetic oracles from Arbela. In Asb. A: iii 4–7, the Assyrian king quotes the utterance of *Issār āšibat Arbail* (“Ištar who dwells in Arbela”). The other, in Asb. B: v 46–49, Assurbanipal narrates the divine response he had received, presumably within the temple of Ištar, while prostrate before her image in Arbela.

Of course, the frequent mention of Arbela together with Assyrian prophecy is not altogether surprising. Rather, as with the association between prophecy and the goddess Ištar discussed earlier, so here, the inordinate association of prophecy with Arbela is the result of an uneven distribution of texts and toponyms among the different sources.¹⁵⁴ Consequently, it remains unclear if there really was, as Nissinen claims,¹⁵⁵ a “strong concentration” of prophecy at this location anymore than at any of the other three Assyria cities where it is also attested.

5.4.1.2 Nineveh.

In addition to Arbela, various sources indicate that prophecy was also prominent at the Assyrian capital Nineveh. The Nin A (i 87–ii 7) inscription of Esarhaddon records that, among other “auspicious signs” (*idāt dumqi*), prophecies (*šipir mahḥê*) were received by the king at the time of his victorious entrance and enthronement in Nineveh. Almost three decades later, and in very different circumstances, SAA 3 13 indicates that it was within Emašmaš, the temple of Ištar at Nineveh, that Assurbanipal sought and received encouraging oracles from Nabû.¹⁵⁶ Parpola suggests that SAA 9 7, the oracle report of the prophetess Mullissu-kabtāt,

“without doubt in Arbela” (idem, “Marduk’s Return and Reconciliation in a Prophetic Letter from Arbela,” in *Verbum et Calamus: Semitic and Related Studies in Honour of the Sixtieth Birthday of Professor Tapani Hariainen*, eds. H. Juusola, J. Laulainen and H. Palva [StudOr 99; Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2004] 211).

¹⁵⁴ See above in section 4.3.

¹⁵⁵ Nissinen, “City as Lofty as Heaven,” 180.

¹⁵⁶ SAA 3 13: 3, 12, 15. Nissinen, “City as Lofty as Heaven,” 191–92 n. 76.

may have had its origins there.¹⁵⁷ Likewise, Emašmaš is also the likely domicile of the male and female prophets whose audience with the king is lamented in SAA 10 109, a letter written by Bel-ušeziḫ, the prominent scholar known to be active and reside in Nineveh.¹⁵⁸ Along these lines, an oracle of Bēl, quoted in another of the scholar's letters, SAA 10 111, may have been uttered in Nineveh as well. Although, in view of Bel-ušeziḫ's Babylonian origins, as well as him frequently being a conduit of information from Babylonian sources,¹⁵⁹ it is just as possible that Bēl's oracle had originally come from somewhere south of the border instead.

Nineveh is also the place of provenance for two letters from Ninevite scholars containing oracle quotations, SAA 10 199 and SAA 10 284.¹⁶⁰ Regarding the second of these, Nissinen claims that the oracle had its origin not in Nineveh but Kalḫu. He argues that the utterance recorded in SAA 9 2.4 ii 29'–33' of Urkittu-šarrat, a prophetess from Kalḫu, had actually served as Nabû-nadin-šumi's source.¹⁶¹ In my view Nissinen overstates the evidence. For, other than that the oracles both exhibit variations on the phrase *lā kēnūni* ("the disloyal ones"), there is little else to sustain Nissinen's claim that one had served as the other's "source."

5.4.1.3 Assur.

The earliest evidence for prophecy in the vicinity of Assur can be found in VS 19 1, a middle Assyrian administration text from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta which lists

¹⁵⁷ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, LI; cf. Nissinen, "City as Lofty as Heaven," 190.

¹⁵⁸ PNA B-G 338–39, sub *Bēl-ušeziḫ*.

¹⁵⁹ On Bel-ušeziḫ's Babylonian background, see M. Dietrich, "Neue Quellen zur Geschichte Babyloniens, II," *WO* 4 (1968) 233–42; *Die Aramäer Südbabyloniens in der Sargonidenzeit (700–648)* (AOAT 7; Kevelaer: Butzon and Bercker, 1970) 62–68.

¹⁶⁰ Adad-šumu-ušur, the scholar who sent SAA 10 199, was the king's personal exorcist, close confidant, and the one responsible to Esarhaddon for the health of Assurbanipal and others in the *bēt redûti* ("Palace of Succession") located in Nineveh. See Parpola, *Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, XXV; PNA A 38–40, sub *Adad-šumu-ušur*. For Nabû-nadin-šumi, a member of the capital city's inner circle and the sender of SAA 10 284, see Parpola, *Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, XXVI; PNA L-N 851–52, sub *Nabû-nādin-šumi*.

¹⁶¹ Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 104; "Orality and Writtenness," 262; "City as lofty as Heaven," 192.

prophets and prophetesses (*maḥḥuʿē*, *maḥḥuʿāte*) together with other cultic personnel “of the Ištar temple.”¹⁶² Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta was built opposite the ancient city of Assur by Tukulti-Ninurta I as a nearby satellite “city for (the god) Aššur” (*āli dAššur*)¹⁶³ wherein he also had erected temples for various deities, including Ištar.¹⁶⁴ More than half a millennium later, prophets were evidently still active within temples at Assur. The Neo-Assyrian administration text SAA 12 69: 27–31 identifies prophetesses (*maḥḥâte*) as part of the temple expenditure for Ešarra, the temple complex of the god Aššur.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, the Ešarra temple is the context for the oracles of the prophets Ilussa-amur (SAA 9 1.5), Nabû-ḥussanni (SAA 9 2.1),¹⁶⁶ and, probably, Mullissu-abu-ušri (SAA 13 37: 7).¹⁶⁷ Finally, Parpola and Nissinen both claim that SAA 9 3.1–3, the prophecies attributed to La-dagil-ili an Arbelite prophet,¹⁶⁸ were publicly proclaimed within the courtyard of Ešarra during Esarhaddon’s coronation in the city of Assur.¹⁶⁹

5.4.1.4 Kalḥu.

Among the Assyrian sources for prophecy, Kalḥu is the least attested heartland city, being clearly associated with prophetic activity in only two texts,

¹⁶² VS 19 1 i 38’–39’.

¹⁶³ RIMA 1 A.0.78.24: 46.

¹⁶⁴ RIMA 1 A.0.78.22: 39–51. For an introduction into the history and archaeology of this city, see T. Eickhoff, “Kār-Tukulti-Ninurta,” *RIA* 5: 455–59.

¹⁶⁵ For Ešarra, see George, *House Most High*, 145 #1035; G. van Driel, *The Cult of Aššur* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1969) 1–31.

¹⁶⁶ Ilussa-amur and Nabû-ḥussanni are both identified as residents of the “Inner City.” Nissinen explains the phrase *Libbi āli* (“Inner City”) as “a honorific designation which implies the message of the centrality of Ashur as the dwelling of the Assyrian supreme god” (idem, “City as Lofty as Heaven,” 190).

¹⁶⁷ For the identification of Mullissu-abu-ušri with Ešarra, see Parpola, *Letters From Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 329; Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 78–81.

¹⁶⁸ SAA 9 1.10, 2.3, and notably, the colophon at the end of SAA 9 3, all identify La-dagil-ili as an Arbelite.

¹⁶⁹ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, LXX; Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 78; “City as Lofty as Heaven,” 189–90. Cf. De Jong, *Isaiah*, 250, 259, 408–12.

and maybe a third. As already mentioned above, the prophetess Urkittu-šarrat is identified as a *Kalḫitu*, a resident of Kalḫu, in SAA 9 2.4. She utters a “word of Ištar” (*abat Issār*) and in all likelihood was attached to *bīt Kidmuri*, the Ištar temple at Kalḫu.¹⁷⁰ In SAA 10 294, “the forlorn scholar” Urad-Gula¹⁷¹ narrates his failure to successfully solicit an oracle from a prophet located at the *bīt Kidmuri*.¹⁷² Lastly, the restoration of the *bīt Kidmuri*, presumably at Kalḫu,¹⁷³ is also the concern of a divine utterance recorded in Assurbanipal’s Asb. T and C inscriptions.¹⁷⁴

5.4.2 Satellite Locations in Assyria.

While all of this points to the phenomenon’s concentration within key Assyrian cities, there is evidence that prophecy was not limited to urban centres only but could also be active within smaller and more remote locations as well. Remut-Allati, the prophetess of SAA 9 1.3, is associated with Dara-aḫuya, an otherwise unattested toponym, and, in all probability, a small and inaccessible town (URU) that is described as *ša birti šaddâni* (“in the midst of the mountains”).¹⁷⁵ Likewise, an incomplete oracle from the same collection, SAA 9 1.9, claims that Ištar

¹⁷⁰ George, *House Most High*, 113 #645; J. Postgate and J. Reade, “Kalḫu,” *RLA* 5: 308–09.

¹⁷¹ For the identification of this text with Urad-Gula, see S. Parpola, “The Forlorn Scholar,” in *Language, Literature, and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner*, eds. E. Reiner and F. Rochberg (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1987) 257–78.

¹⁷² Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 86–88. Cf. De Jong (*Isaiah*, 292–93) who disputes Parpola’s and Nissinen’s reading and interpretation of the damaged lines which refer to the prophet.

¹⁷³ Since there were two *bīt Kidmuri* (Kalḫu, Nineveh) in the Neo-Assyrian period, Nissinen had earlier suggested that there can be no certainty over which of these is being referred to in Asb. T (idem, *References to Prophecy*, 36). Despite this, he subsequently considers Kalḫu as the location in question (idem, “City as Lofty as Heaven,” 194–95). For the existence of a *bīt Kidmuri* in Nineveh, see D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (OIP 2; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924) 99: 44; Menzel, *Tempel I*, 118–22; J. Reade, “Ninive (Nineveh),” *RLA* 9: 409–10; E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften* (AfOB 26; Wien: Institut für Orientalistik der Universität Wien, 1997) 46–47.

¹⁷⁴ Asb. T ii 5–24 (C i 53–66).

¹⁷⁵ Parpola (*Assyrian Prophecies*, 6) suggests that Dara-aḫuya may be compared to Dara-abuya a town located near Dur-Šarruken. Nissinen, who discusses this locale in some detail, considers Dara-aḫuya to have been a small settlement, possibly “a village in the vicinity of Arbela” which was “somewhere ‘out there’ when Esarhaddon and his troops were on the move towards Nineveh,” or “nothing but an intermediary station” (idem, “City as Lofty as Heaven,” 207).

of Arbela, having departed Egašankalamma, was now residing in an isolated settlement somewhere out in the steppe from whence she sent her divine utterance.¹⁷⁶ And finally, SAA 10 24 records an oracle delivered in the midst of Labbanat, probably located some 350km south of Assur, close to the border between Assyria and Babylonia, possibly near modern Baghdad.¹⁷⁷

5.4.3 Babylonia and the (Near-)West.

The geographic distribution of prophecy also extended beyond Assyria with almost a quarter of all sources indicating that it was an active phenomenon across Mesopotamia. To the south, prophets and their oracles are associated with the cities and temples of Akkad,¹⁷⁸ Babylon¹⁷⁹ and Uruk,¹⁸⁰ as well as arising from the marginal

¹⁷⁶ Nissinen (“City as Lofty as Heaven,” 183–86) argues that “the steppe” here actually refers to the “palace of the steppe,” the Akitu house at Milqa (E.GAL.EDIN; George, *House Most High*, 87 #313) to which Ištar of Arbela would go during the king’s absence from Assyria while on foreign campaigns.

¹⁷⁷ Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 32–35; W. Lambert, “Esarhaddon’s Attempt to Return Marduk to Babylon,” in *Ad bene et fideliter seminandum: Festgabe für Karheinz Deller* (AOAT 220; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1988) 157–74; G. Frame, *A Political History*, 76–78.

¹⁷⁸ As evidenced by the activity of a prophetess in the substitute king ritual recorded in SAA 10 352. For the newly reestablished city of Akkad as the site of the substitute king ritual, see Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 68–77; “City as lofty as Heaven,” 202–03; cf. B. Landsberger who understands “Akkad” as an alternative term for “Babylonia” (idem, *Brief des Bischofs von Esagila an König Asarhaddon* [Amsterdam: Nood-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1965] 38–39, 40 n. 57); Cole and Machinist, *Letters from Priests*, 38. For the text’s relationship to SAA 13 37 and Mullissu-abu-ušri, the prophetess of Ešarra recorded therein, see W. von Soden, “Beiträge zum Verständnis der neuassyrischen Briefe über die Ersatzkönigriten,” in *Vorderasiatische Studien: Festschrift für Prof. Dr. Viktor Christian, gewidmet von Kollegen und Schülern zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. K. Chubert (Wien: Notring der wissenschaftlichen Verbände Österreichs, 1956) 102; Landsberger, *Brief*, 49; Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 329; Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 78–81.

¹⁷⁹ SAA 3 34=35; Borger, *Inschriftenwerk*, 201–03. For the background of SAA 3 34=35 with Esaggil, the temple of Marduk in Babylon, see Livingstone, *Explanatory Works*, 232–53; Frymer-Kensky, “Tribulations,” 132–141; Nissinen, “City as Lofty as Heaven,” 201.

¹⁸⁰ Asb. A: vi 107–118 (T: v 9–32; F: v 72–vi 11); Bauer, *Inschriftenwerk*, 61–62. On Assurbanipal’s recovery and return to Uruk of the statue of Nanaya from Elam, see M. Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah, and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* (SBLMS 19; Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974) 13–15; Frame, *A Political History*, 202.

“Sealand” region, situated at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.¹⁸¹ To the West, Nabû-reḫtu-uṣur’s flurry of conspiracy letters,¹⁸² which record genuinely prophetic as well as pseudo-prophetic quotations,¹⁸³ demonstrate that prophecy was also active *ina qanni ša Ḥarrān* (“on the outskirts of Ḥarran”), a metaphor for the location of Eḫulḫul, the temple of Sin at Ḥarran.¹⁸⁴ An oracle of Sin, of which Marduk-šumu-uṣir reminds Assurbanipal in SAA 10 174, was reportedly uttered there as well, as probably was also another of Sin’s oracles in Asb. T: ii 31–44 which called for the restoration of Eḫulḫul, the temple of Sin at Ḥarran.¹⁸⁵

5.4.4 On the Periphery of the Empire.

Even further afield, there is evidence which indirectly suggests that prophecy—along the lines of that found in Assyria—may have been a phenomenon familiar among the empire’s outlying regions as well. From the far western periphery of the empire at Kunalia (Heb. כְּנַלְיָה; modern T. Tayinat), the Neo-Assyrian administrative capital of the imperial province of Unqi,¹⁸⁶ a copy of Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty has been recently unearthed *in situ*.¹⁸⁷ Among the various groups mentioned in the Treaty, *raggimu* and *maḥḥû* both appear as potential conspirators

¹⁸¹ ABL 839. For Nabû-bel-šumate, grandson of Merodach-Baladan II, governor of the Sealand, chief of the significant Bit Yakin tribe, and eventual ally of Šamaš-šuma-ukin against Assurbanipal, see Frame, *A Political History*, 127–29, 175–82; PNA L-N 811, sub *Nabû-bēl-šumāti*.

¹⁸² SAA 16. 59–60.

¹⁸³ Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 108–53.

¹⁸⁴ Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 123.

¹⁸⁵ For Ḥarran and Eḫulḫul, see J. Postgate, “Ḥarrān,” *RLA* 4: 122–26; George, *House Most High*, 99 #470.

¹⁸⁶ A region encompassing the Amuq Plain in the North Orontes Valley.

¹⁸⁷ T.1801; for the tablet’s discovery, publication, and a discussion of its context, see T. Harrison, *Tayinat Archaeological Project: 2009 Seasonal Report* (2010), http://www.utoronto.ca/tap/reports/2009Report_en.pdf accessed November 29, 2012; J. Lauinger, “Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty,” 87–123; and “Some Preliminary Thoughts on the Tablet Collection in Building XVI from Tell Tayinat,” *CSMSJ* 6 (2011) 5–14; T. Harrison and J. Osbourne, “Building XVI and the Neo-Assyrian Sacred precinct at Tell Tayinat,” *JCS* 64 (2012) 125–43.

against which the oath takers, the *bēl pāḥiti* (“governor”) and others of Kullania,¹⁸⁸ had promised to keep on their guard.¹⁸⁹ On the opposite side of the empire, vassals of Assyria from the far eastern periphery had made the same pledge to oppose prophetic treachery. Eight fragmentary Treaty manuscripts, all duplicates to the one found in Kullania, were recovered from Kalḥu. Each copy records a different *bēl ālu* (“city ruler”) and their place of origin, all of which lie within, or near to, the region of Media.¹⁹⁰

Of course, care should be taken against inferring too much from the occurrence of prophets in this text, not least but because the Treaty’s contents perhaps reflect more of the socio-political situation within the Assyrian heartland than in its periphery.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, given that it is a treaty agreement after all, which presumably entails that oath takers understand the Treaty’s requirements so that they could be reasonably expected to fulfill them or be held accountable for their transgressions, it seems reasonable to expect that vassals were at least familiar with prophecy.

5.4.5 Temple Venues.

From the above discussion, it should be fairly clear that temples were a prominent venue for prophetic activity. Indeed, the connection between prophecy and temples is most explicit in the attestations of prophetic temple functionaries

¹⁸⁸ Following the reference to the *bēl pāḥiti*, sixteen various occupational groups are mentioned (Asb. T.1801: i 4–11), ending with “[all] the men [of his hands], great and small, as many as there are...” (T.1801: i 11–12).

¹⁸⁹ Though much of the obverse in T.1801 is not preserved (§§ 7–21), including the reference to prophets in § 10, because the text of T.1801 “is almost identical to that of the Nimrud manuscripts” (Lauinger, “Treaty,” 90) there can be little doubt that the reference was originally present.

¹⁹⁰ For these treaties and discussion of the vassals involved, see D. Wiseman, “The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon,” *Iraq* 20 (1958) 1–99; S. Parpola and K. Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (SAA 2; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1998) XIX–XXX.

¹⁹¹ Wiseman notes that, since all the copies were found in Kalḥu, they were probably created there originally (idem, “Vassal-Treaties,” 5, 90).

(šēlūtu),¹⁹² prophets in temple ration lists¹⁹³ and their association with cultic rituals,¹⁹⁴ reports of oracles and prophetic activity by temple personnel.¹⁹⁵ In addition to these indicators, scholars have suggested that the temple context is also evident in the close socio-religious relationship between prophets and members of the cult community in lexical and omen texts,¹⁹⁶ the textual affinities between oracles and cult literature,¹⁹⁷ the temple and cult concerns of various oracles,¹⁹⁸ as well as the supplication—reassurance pattern apparently behind some oracles.¹⁹⁹

5.4.6 Non-Temple Venues.

Although the temple undoubtedly was a prominent venue, nevertheless, it evidently wasn't the only context for prophetic activity. Indeed, the abovementioned oracle from Labbanat gives no indication of it being uttered in a temple context, even if there was one at this outpost.²⁰⁰ Rather, the servant Bel-eriba reportedly was already on horseback—an indication that he was most likely outdoors and, possibly, in a public place—when he prophesied.²⁰¹

Prophecy's public audience is even more explicit in SAA 10 352 where the second oracle of the unnamed prophetess is described as having been prophesied

¹⁹² SAA 9 1.7; 13 148. Cf. Van der Toorn, "Mesopotamian Prophecy," 82–84.

¹⁹³ SAA 12 69.

¹⁹⁴ SAA 3 34=35; Farber 1977 A IIa.

¹⁹⁵ SAA 13 37, 139, 144.

¹⁹⁶ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVII; Nissinen, "Socioreligious Role," 95–96, 111; De Jong, *Isaiah*, 297–98.

¹⁹⁷ M. Weippert, "Die Bildsprache der neuassyrischen Prophetie," in *Beiträge zur prophetischen Bildsprache in Israel und Assyrien*, eds. H. Weippert, K. Seybold and M. Weippert (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985) 87; Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVII–XLVII; Nissinen, "Socioreligious Role," 97–98; Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy*, 60; C. Halton, "Allusions to the Stream of Tradition in Neo-Assyrian Oracles," *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 46 (2009) 50–61.

¹⁹⁸ Pongratz-Leisten, *Herrschaftswissen*, 83; see also 5.6.2.

¹⁹⁹ De Jong, *Isaiah*, 229. See 5.1.1.

²⁰⁰ Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 32–35.

²⁰¹ On the public nature of the event recorded in SAA 10 24, see de Jong, *Isaiah*, 305–07.

ina puḥri ša māti (“in the assembly of the country”).²⁰² A wide listenership is also addressed in SAA 9 3.2, where the deity summons, “listen carefully, O Assyrians.” Likewise, in SAA 9 2.4, the goddess proclaims that she “will speak to the multitude (*ma’dūti*)”—a statement which refers to a sizable audience as indicated by the words that follow: “listen carefully, sunrise and sunset...” According to Parpola, ZT 13463 indicates that prophets could be active in the public arena of the city gate,²⁰³ while SAA 10 109 implies that prophets (and prophetesses) could be summoned and, possibly,²⁰⁴ consulted in the context of the royal court.²⁰⁵ Finally, to some scholars the attestation of the *raggimu* Quqî in a list of lodgings for military officials suggests that, like haruspices, prophets could accompany the army and their services solicited while on campaigns.²⁰⁶

5.4.7 Summary.

It is not altogether surprising that Assyrian sources indicate that prophecy was active primarily among Assyrian cities. The picture is counterbalanced, however, by the important and not infrequent occurrence of prophetic activity outside of the Assyrian heartland, including Ḫarran in the west and Babylonia in the south as well as indirect hints of a familiarity with prophecy among vassals on the periphery of the empire. All of this is to say that prophecy, even when observed only through the Assyrian sources, was clearly a widespread phenomenon which,

²⁰² Parpola (*Prophecies*, XLV) claims this attestation is evidence for “the role of prophets as speakers to the masses.” Nissinen (*References to Prophecy*, 75) suggests that the “assembly” might have been comparable to the public forums evident in the Early Dynastic and Old Babylonian periods.

²⁰³ Parpola, “Texts from Ziyaret Tepe,” 99.

²⁰⁴ See section 5.1.2.

²⁰⁵ Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 93–95.

²⁰⁶ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, CIV n. 243; Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 64–65. On the position of haruspices within the military organization, see I. Starr, *Queries to the Sun god: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria* (SAA 4; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project and Helsinki University Press, 1990) XXX–XXXI.

whilst possibly more concentrated among the “four doorjambs,” was certainly not a phenomenon restricted only to them.

Although there are no explicit reports of prophetic activity occurring in the temple, the Assyrian sources do provide a substantial amount of indirect evidence to indicate that temples functioned as a venue for prophecy. However, notable exceptions to this pattern are attested which suggest that prophecy could also occur outside the temple context in more public arenas.

5.5 Prophetic Means for Delivering Oracles.

The sources for Assyrian prophecy describe the delivery of oracles as a fairly straightforward two-step process. Oracles were initially transmitted from the deity to the prophet, and, then, from the prophet to their immediate audience. Where such descriptions occur together in a text,²⁰⁷ they usually appear in the reverse order,²⁰⁸ a format that will be followed in the discussion below.

5.5.1 Oracles Spoken.²⁰⁹

The means by which Assyrian prophets transmitted oracles to their audiences appears to have been primarily spoken. Two features point to the oral delivery of oracles among Assyrian sources:²¹⁰ First, a number of texts describe the activity of intermediaries transmitting divine messages with terms that denote verbal

²⁰⁷ SAA 9 6–7; 10 24, 199, 352; 13 37, 144; 16 59.

²⁰⁸ With the notable exception of SAA 9 6.

²⁰⁹ An alternative outline of the oral character of Assyrian prophecy can be found in de Jong’s important study (idem, *Isaiah*, 180–6). However, de Jong conflates the spoken word of the deity—a mode of divine revelation—with the spoken word of the prophet, which indicates the transmission of the oracle to an audience. These are distinguished and discussed separately in this study.

²¹⁰ According to Parpola, the phrase *ša pî PN* (“of/by the mouth”) and its variant *issu pî PN*, which occur in the oracle collections SAA 9 1–2, indicate the “basically oral nature of Neo-Assyrian prophecy” (idem, *Assyrian Prophecies*, LXIII). However, closer inspection calls into question Parpola’s claim as misleadingly literal and suggests that the phrase serves more generally to denote attribution. For discussion, see Atkinson, “Prophecy in K1285?” 86, esp. n. 142.

communication. These include the common verbs of speaking *qabû*²¹¹ and *dabābu*,²¹² which are already familiar from the prophetic reports of Mari, as well as *ragāmu* (“to prophesy”; lit. “to exclaim, shout”),²¹³ *bakû* (“to cry, weep”),²¹⁴ and *damāmu* (“to wail”),²¹⁵ verbs with a more modal nuance. The letter of Mar-Issar, which reports to Esarhaddon two brief prophetic oracles, is an especially interesting example:

SAA 10 352: e. 23–r. 4.

A prophetess had prophesied. She said to Damqî, the son of the chief administrator: “You will takeover the kingship.” Again, the prophetess said to him in the assembly of the country: “I have revealed the thieving polecat of my lord and placed it in your hands.”

Here, Mar-Issar twice equates “prophesying” (*ragāmu*) with the verbal activity of “speaking” (*qabû*) divine oracles in front of different audiences—first to an individual, Damqî the substitute king, and then to “the assembly of the country.” Evidently the oracles were both audible and comprehensible to those who were there, for, immediately beforehand (line 22), Mar-Issar mentions that he himself had “heard” (*šemû*) the prophetess, while afterward (lines r. 7–9) he describes the impact that the event had upon its audience.

A second indication that oracles were delivered orally is that, on several occasions, the divine message is transmitted within the quoted direct speech of the prophet.²¹⁶ In these instances, quotations function to introduce the divine origins of the oracle by referring to the deity, their actions, or their “word” (*abātu* + DN)—all in the third person. In some cases, embedding the oracle within the direct speech of

²¹¹ SAA 10 199: r. 5; 352: e. 24, r. 2.

²¹² SAA 16 59: 3–4.

²¹³ SAA 9 10: s. 1–2; 10 352: e. 23; 13 37: 7–10; 144: r. 7.

²¹⁴ SAA 3 34: 28 = 35: 31.

²¹⁵ SAA 3 23: 5.

²¹⁶ Marked quotations (i.e. preceded by the quotative particle *mā*) occur in SAA 9 7: 1–2, 12; 10 24: r. 7–9; 199: 5–7. Alternatively, quotations of the prophet occur unmarked in the oracle collections: SAA 9 2.4: ii 29–30; 3.4: ii 3–34; 3.5: 16–17, and in the oracle reports: SAA 9 5: 1; 6: 1–2; 9 9: 1–7, r. 1–3.

the prophet produces a complex arrangement, wherein the divine message is presented as a quote within a quote:

SAA 9 7: 1–2, 12–13.

Thus (says) Mullissu-kabtāt (i.e. the prophetess):

“This is the word of Queen Mullissu: ‘Fear not!’”

“Mullissu has said: ‘You shall reign over the kings of the lands.’”

SAA 10 199: 5–7.

He (i.e. the prophet) said this as follows:

“The deity said to me, ‘If you...’ ”

Only three occasions attribute activity to prophets other than speaking: *alāku* (“to go/come”),²¹⁷ *ṭarādu* (“to send”),²¹⁸ and the ambiguous term *sarḥat*.²¹⁹ Whilst it is unlikely that either of the first two have anything to do with the process of communicating oracles, Parpola’s translation of *sarḥat* as “enraptured” implies that the maidservant was in a state of altered consciousness at the time she was uttering the purported divine message.²²⁰ However, Parpola’s interpretation of the term, as an Aramaism of a West Semitic verb that is itself unclear,²²¹ is not altogether satisfying. Alternatively, *sarḥat* may be taken as a G stat. of *šarāḥu* (“to take pride in”), whereby the original sibilant <š> was later replaced by its allophone <s>, a phenomenon not uncommon in the late Neo-Assyrian period.²²² According to this interpretation, the maidservant was not so much “enraptured” as she was “boastful” in her exhortations of the usurper Sasi.²²³

²¹⁷ SAA 3 34: 28–29 = 35: 31.

²¹⁸ SAA 10 24: r. 4.

²¹⁹ SAA 16 59: r. 3.

²²⁰ Parpola *apud* Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 109–11; see esp. n. 430.

²²¹ HALOT, שרַח, 1355.

²²² Hämeen-Anttila, *Neo-Assyrian Grammar*, 9–10.

²²³ See esp. CAD Š/2 61–63, sub *šarḥu*.

5.5.4 Prophetic Revelation.

According to the Assyrian sources, even as prophets verbally communicated oracles to their audiences, apparently so did deities. Like prophets, deities are also reported to have “spoken” (*qabû*, *dabābu*) and their messages are formally marked by a quotative particle (either *mā* or *umma*). Sometimes it is the prophets themselves who describe the verbal activity of deities, as already indicated in the last two examples.²²⁴ More often, however, the role of the human intermediary is omitted and the description of a deity’s speaking is placed directly in the mouth of the (freq. royal) narrator.²²⁵ For example:²²⁶

SAA 10 284: r. 4–8.

Just as Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela have said to me: “We shall extinguish from Assyria those who are disloyal to the king our lord.”

SAA 3 13: 13.

Nabû continued to speak: “Your mouth is that one which is beautiful and repeatedly prays to the Urukean.

Asb. A iii: 4–7.

Ištar, who dwells in Arbela, delivered Aḫšeri... into the hands of his servants, according to the word that she said in the beginning: “I will, as I said, take care of the Execution of Aḫšeri, the king of Mannea.”

And finally, even as the last pericope has already shown, the deities themselves occasionally describe having previously spoken their messages.²²⁷

SAA 9 1.1: i 15’–17’.

Which of my words that I have spoken to you could you not rely upon?

²²⁴ In addition to SAA 9 7 and 10 199, see also SAA 16 59: r. 4–5; 9 6: 1–2 (verb not preserved).

²²⁵ For a preliminary discussion on the tendency to omit references to prophetic intermediaries in more complex literary texts, see Atkinson, “Prophecy in K1285?,” 78–82, esp. n. 110.

²²⁶ See also SAA 3 31: 18–r. 2; 9 8: 2; 10 111: 23–26e; Asb. A: vi 113–117; T: ii 33–37; B: v 47–49 (omits quotative particle). Verbs omitted in the following: SAA 16 60: (CT 52 107) 12’–14’; ABL 839: r. 11–18.

²²⁷ See also SAA 9 1.6: iii 30’–31’; 7: 3; Asb. A: iii 4–7. With *dabābu*: SAA 9 1.4: ii 17’–18’; 2.4: ii 34’.

SAA 9 1.10: vi 7–12

Couldn't you rely upon the earlier word that I had spoken to you? Now you can rely upon the later words too!

SAA 9 7: 12, 14.

"Mullissu has said: 'Moreover, let me say to you that like Elam, I will finish off the land of the Cimmerians!'"

In a few texts the activity of a deity transmitting a message is also described by the term *šapāru* ("to send").²²⁸ Whilst orality is not a meaning intrinsic to the verb, it is by no means absent either.²²⁹ In at least one pericope the audibility of the deity's transmission is indicated by the narrator (i.e. Assurbanipal) who claims to have "heard" (*šemû*) the divine message he had received from Marduk:

K.120B+: 24–27.²³⁰

According to your divine message which you sent: "I will scatter the contingent [of . . .] Sandakšatru, his son, his own offspring, which they appointed as his replacement, I [. . .]." When I heard this, I praised Marduk, the Hero.

5.5.5 Summary

It has been shown that prophets transmitted oracles to their immediate audiences orally. The terms which describe this verbal activity suggest that prophets spoke divine messages both audibly and comprehensibly, though, in certain cultic contexts, they were known to articulate oracles while weeping. Albeit usually brief, a quotation of the prophet's own words occasionally precedes the oracle—a feature that not only indicates the oral context even further but also serves to introduce the divine speaker of the subsequent message. Finally, it was shown that orality also defines the mode of communication from deities to prophets. The deities are often described by terms identical to those otherwise used

²²⁸ SAA 10 24: 7–8; K.120B+: 24–26. Similarly, Asb. T: ii 16–17 (= C i: 61) records that Ištar of Kidmuri had "constantly sent prophetic messages" (*šipir maḥḥê ištānappara kayyāna*).

²²⁹ CAD Š/1 430–48, sub *šapāru*.

²³⁰ For text, see Borger, *Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, 202.

to denote the verbal activity of their human mouthpieces. Logically then, this suggests that prophetic revelation was also characterized by an audible presentation of the divine message spoken by the deity to the prophet.

5.6 Prophetic Messages in the Neo-Assyrian Sources.

5.6.1 Oracles as encouragements.

The dominant message of the prophetic oracles was one of divine support for the Assyrian kingship. Indeed, even in their royal inscriptions, Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal both refer to the timely encouragement they had occasionally received through the “messages of the prophets” (*šipir mahḥê*).²³¹ Analysis of the contents of the oracles themselves demonstrate that the deities supported the Assyrian kingship in two ways: first, by divinely affirming the king’s rule and dominion; and secondly, by promising to protect the king and defend his rule against all threats. Each of these is discussed, in turn, below.

5.6.1.1 Divine affirmation of the Assyrian kingship.

References to the divine genealogy, appointment, and territorial mandate of the king—all features familiar from the Assyrian royal inscriptions²³²—are no less present among the prophetic oracles. According to the goddess Ištar, as the “son of Mullissu,” Esarhaddon was the “legitimate heir” (*aplu kēnu*)²³³ whom she “protected and raised in the Palace of Succession” (*ina bēt rēdūti taqānu rabû*) until his enthronement as king.²³⁴ The Palace of Succession is also where the goddess

²³¹ See RINAP 4 1: ii 6–7; 57: ii 12–25; Asb B: v 47, 93–95.

²³² B. Cifola, *Analysis of Variants in the Assyrian Royal Titulary from the Origins to Tiglath-Pileser III* (Napoli: Istituto universitario orientale, 1995) 162–70; M. Liverani, “Critique of Variants and the Titulary of Sennacherib,” in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons in Literary, Ideological, and Historical Analysis*, ed. F. Fales (OAC 17 Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente, 1981) 225–57.

²³³ SAA 9 1.6: iv 5, 20. For the same title in secular use among the royal inscriptions, see RIMA A.0.87.1: vii 49

²³⁴ SAA 9 1.2: i 33–35.

promises Assurbanipal “whom she raised” (*rabû*)²³⁵ that she will “protect” (*haṣānu*) him “until I have done and given you what I promised, *namely* until you yourself exercise kingship *and* your father will gird the diadem.”²³⁶

From Ištar’s preparation of the Assyrian crown-princes for kingship, it is only a small step to her claims that she also “established” (*kānu*) their throne and crown.²³⁷ Exactly how the goddess did this is largely left unexplained, although a number of oracles point to her role as a divine advocate who reconciles (*sullumu*) the divine pantheon to the Assyrian king.²³⁸ Thus, Ištar’s involvement in the appointment of the king to kingship should hardly be understood as exclusive. On two occasions the goddess formulates her promises of dynastic succession by invoking the role of Ninurta,²³⁹ while elsewhere, the Babylonian deity Bel states that it was “sixty Great Gods” (*šūš ilāni rabûti*) who had “girded the loins” (*qabla rakāsu*) of Esarhaddon.²⁴⁰

Reference to the king’s territorial mandate in the oracles is initially implied by the deities’ use of the titles “king of Assyria” (*šar māt Aššūr*)²⁴¹ and “king of lands” (*šar mātāti*)²⁴² when they address the king. The first title, as itself suggests, refers to his sovereignty over Assyria, while the second is more universal and includes

²³⁵ SAA 13 139: 4.

²³⁶ SAA 9 7: 3–7.

²³⁷ SAA 9 1.6: iii 21–22; 2.1: i 7; 2.3: ii 5; possibly also 2.2: i 31.

²³⁸ SAA 9 1.4: ii 31; 2.3: ii 3; 2.5: iii 20; 2.6: iv 19.

²³⁹ SAA 9 1.10: vi 27–30; 2.3: ii 13–14.

²⁴⁰ SAA 9 1.4: ii 25–26. For the idiomatic use of *qabla rakāsu* as a phrase denoting investiture, see CAD R 97, sub *rakāsu*; also SAA 17 46: r. 2; 102: r. 6–7; 105: e. 12– e. 13.

²⁴¹ SAA 9 1.2: i 30–31; 1.6: iii 26, iv 11; 1.9: v 26; 2.1: i 10; 2.2: i 22; 2.3: i 37; 2.4: iii 17; 3.1: i 11; 3.4: ii 34; 3.5: iii 17; 4: 2; 5: 5, 9; 10 111: r. 23; 13 139: 3. On the earliest use of this ubiquitous title, see Cifola, *Assyrian Royal Titulary*, 20–21.

²⁴² SAA 9 1.1: i 4. There are two close variants which occur among the royal inscriptions. The first, “magnificent king of lands” (*šar mātāti šarḥu*), occurs in the titularies of Ashurnasipal II (RIMA 2 A.0.101.40: 5) and Shalmaneser III (RIMA 3 A.0.102.2: i 10; 6: i 22; 8: 18). The second, “lord of lands” (*bēl mātāti*), is more common and is used to refer both to deities and kings (RIMA 2 A.0.87.1: 4; 89.4: 3; 101.40: 8; 47: 2; 102.2: i 1; 4: 3; 14: 13). See also the discussion in A. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First millennium BC I (1114–859 BC)* (RIMA 2; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) 95 n. 3.

Assyria's neighbors. According to the oracles, these dominions were given by the deities and required no effort on the part of the king. As to the conferral of Assyria, in SAA 9 1.6 Ištar promises to "give" (*nadānu*) to Esarhaddon "endless days and everlasting years" (*ša ūmē arkūte šanāte dārāte*) in the political capital Assur²⁴³ as well as the major cities of Nineveh, Calah, and Arbela.²⁴⁴ The same cities are also implied in SAA 9 3.5 where the goddess claims to have "bent" (*kepû*) and "given" (*nadānu*) the "four doorjambs of Assyria" (*erbet sippī ša māt Aššūr*).²⁴⁵

With regards to lands beyond the borders of Assyria, the deity Aššur boldly asserts that he has "given" (*nadānu*) to Esarhaddon "all of the four regions" (*kippat erbetti*) so that "from sunrise to sunset there is no king equal to him" (*bēt inappaḥanni bēt irabbūni šarru miḥiršu laššu*).²⁴⁶ Elsewhere, the goddess Ištar of Arbela promises that "I will erase the borders of the countries and give them to you" (*taḥūmāni ša mātāti ugammār addanakka*).²⁴⁷ Lastly, the Babylonian deity Bel says "I will deliver all the countries into his hands" (*mātāti gabbi ana qatēšu amanni*).²⁴⁸

In all, the deities sought to communicate that the king's supreme position and universal dominion was entirely due to their divine arrangement. As such, there is a reassuring permanence about the kingship as it reflects the fulfillment of divine actions and promises. Nevertheless, threats to the divine *status quo* did arise, to which the deities could be counted upon to protect and defend the kingship that they had established.

²⁴³ SAA 9 1.6: iv 14–17.

²⁴⁴ SAA 9 1.6: iii 9–14.

²⁴⁵ SAA 9 3.5: iii 20–21, iv 15–16.

²⁴⁶ SAA 9 3.2: ii 3–6.

²⁴⁷ SAA 9 2.3: ii 15–16. Interestingly, the divine "erasure" (*gamāru*) of borders in this text is reversed in SAA 9 7: 8–13 where, immediately after Assurbanipal's divine investiture as supreme ruler over foreign kings, he is authorised by Ištar to "show them their boundaries *and* determine the roads that they take" (*taḥūmāni tukallamšunu ḥūlāni ina šēpēšunu tašakkan*).

²⁴⁸ A similar image occurs in Assurbanipal's Asb. A account of the death of the Mannean king Aḫšēri which is narrated not so much as the personal achievement of the Assyrian king but as a divine victory and the fulfillment of an oracle of Ištar. For text, see the previous section 5.5.4.

5.6.1.2 Divine opposition to threats against the Assyrian kingship.

The deities freely acknowledge the existence of internal as well as external threats to the Assyrian kingship. Among the oracles related to Esarhaddon's rule, the most commonly attested internal threat is the existence of unspecified "enemies" (*nakru*).²⁴⁹ Also mentioned are "hostile foes" (*ayyābu*),²⁵⁰ "adversaries" (*gaššišu*),²⁵¹ and "traitors" (*sarsarranu*)²⁵² who had "conspired" (*dabābu*),²⁵³ "expelled" (*wašû*), and surrounded" (*labû*) the king.²⁵⁴ In one oracle, the goddess Ištar lambasts unnamed "disloyal ones" (*lā kēnu*)²⁵⁵ and even quotes their seditious grumbling:

SAA 9 2.4: iii 7–10.

How, how (to answer) those who [. . .] to many [people], saying: "When will there be a change in the country?" and "Let us not stay in Calah or Nineveh!"

For the most part, however, these references are all non-specific and can be taken to reflect the general disorder in Assyria prior to the consolidation of Esarhaddon's rule.²⁵⁶ More explicit identification of those actually involved in the conspiracy against his kingship occurs in SAA 9 3.5. There, Ištar mentions Esarhaddon's own brothers, euphemistically referred to as "the one on the left and the one on the right" (*ša imitti ša šumēli*), as well as the "courtiers" (*manzāz ekalli*) and "palace servants" (*urdu ekalli*) "who rebelled" (*seḥû*) against him.²⁵⁷

²⁴⁹ SAA 9 1.1: i 8, 13, 19; 1.2: i 31, ii 6, 13; 1.4: ii 34; 1.6: iv 9; [2.1: i 11; 2.2: i 23]; 2.3: iii 1, 10, 21; 2.5: iii 22–23, 32; 3.2: i 28–29; 3.3: ii 22; 3.5: iii 22, iv 17; 5: r. 3–4, e. 10; 6: r. 4, 10. On the association of these oracles with the civil war and conspiracy against Esarhaddon, see Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, LXVIII–LXXV; Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 14–34.

²⁵⁰ SAA 9 3.5: iii 23; 5: 7.

²⁵¹ SAA 9 3.5: iii 23.

²⁵² For this translation of *sarsarranu* see Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, 23–24; cf. M. Weippert, "Heiliger Krieg' in Israel und Assyrien," ZAW 84 (1972) 481; "König," 45–46.

²⁵³ See also the expression "conspiring polecats and rats" (*kakkišāti pušḫāti ša idabbabūni*) in SAA 9 1.6: v 3–5.

²⁵⁴ SAA 9 3.3: ii 10–12.

²⁵⁵ SAA 9 2.4: ii 29, 32; also occurs in a letter 10 284: r. 6–7.

²⁵⁶ Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLIII, LXVIII–LXXV; Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 14–34.

²⁵⁷ SAA 9 3.5: iv 22–27.

Oracular references to the internal opposition against Assurbanipal are limited to only two texts: SAA 9 9 and 3 13. In the first, Ištar promises the king that she will “slaughter” (*ṭabāḥu*) “your hostile foe” (*ayyābka*),²⁵⁸ while in the latter, Nabû avoids Assurbanipal’s use of “enemy” (*bēl ṣassi*)²⁵⁹ and refers only to his “ill-wishers” (*ḥaddānu*).²⁶⁰ Although neither oracle identifies whom these terms refer to, since both texts date from the period the Assyrian king was waging civil war against his rebellious older brother,²⁶¹ it seems reasonable to conclude that they refer to Šamaš-šumu-ukin and his allies.

In addition to various threats from within, the deities also refer to Assyria’s traditionally hostile neighbors, and, occasionally, identify their foreign kings by name. In an oracle to Esarhaddon, Aššur moves clockwise across the fertile crescent promising to “destroy” (*ḥepû*) Melid, “deliver” (*šakānu*) the Cimmerians,²⁶² and “set on fire” (*išātu emēdu*) the land of Ellipi.²⁶³ Elsewhere, Ištar moves in the opposite direction and claims that she will “select” (*bêru*) the “envoys” (*šîru*) of Elamite and Mannean kings, “seal” (*barāmu*) the “messages” (*šîtru*) of the Urartean king, and “cut off” (*batāqu*) Mugallu the king of Melid.²⁶⁴ Unsurprisingly, several of these lands are also attested in oracles to Assurbanipal, signifying their continued unruliness into his reign. In one oracle, an unidentified deity promises to “exterminate” (*gamāru*)

²⁵⁸ SAA 9 9: 26.

²⁵⁹ SAA 3 13: r. 5.

²⁶⁰ SAA 3 13: r. 9. For this translation, see CAD H 23, sub *ḥādi’ānu*. Cf. “full of malice, envy” in AHw, *ḥāddānu/ḥādiānu*, 307.

²⁶¹ On the historical background of these texts, see Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, LXXI; Atkinson, “Prophecy in K1285,” 64. For this war, see Frame, *A Political History*, 131–90.

²⁶² On the Cimmerians and their encroachment into the north and northwest regions of Assyria during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, see A. Ivantchik, *Les Cimmériens au Proche-Orient* (OBO 127; Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1993).

²⁶³ SAA 9 3.2: i 35–ii 2. Note that lines 36–37 are badly damaged and largely unreadable. Nissinen (*References to Prophecy*, 119) suggests that these lines “probably mention other neighboring countries and potential enemies of Assyria.”

²⁶⁴ SAA 9 2.4: iii 12–15. On the identity of Mugallu as the king of Melid and an obstacle to Esarhaddon’s attempts to control Anatolia, see Starr, *Queries*, LVII–LVIII.

Elam and “overwhelm” (*sapānu*) its army.²⁶⁵ Echoing this, Ištar will “exterminate” the Cimmerians “like Elam” (*kî Elamtu*)²⁶⁶ and makes an enigmatic reference to her future incursion into Egypt.²⁶⁷ Finally, in an oracular quote embedded in Asb. A, Ištar explicitly refers to “Aḫšeri the king of the Mannians” whom she is determined to “put to death” (*mītūtu epēšu*).²⁶⁸

The deities promise to respond to such threats primarily in two ways. First, they promise to protect the Assyrian kingship. Assurances of divine protection are commonly communicated in the oracles by the terms *naṣāru* (“to guard, watch over”)²⁶⁹ and *taqānu* (“to secure, keep safe”).²⁷⁰ Occurrences of *naṣāru* express the divine concern to preserve the personal safety of the king and are invariably embedded within extended descriptions of the divine guardianship of the deities (usu. Ištar) over their royal ward. For example:

SAA 9 7: r. 6–11.

He whose mother is Mullissu, do not fear! He whose nanny is the Lady of Arbela, do not fear! Like a nanny, I will carry you upon my hip. *Like* a fragrant substance, I will place you between my breasts. At nighttime I am awake and will protect you. At daytime I will give you your milk. At dawn, I will play *unnānika uṣur uṣur* with you. You must not fear, my young calf whom I myself have raised.

Oracular use of the term *taqānu*, on the other hand, refers not so much to the protection of the king’s physical welfare²⁷¹ as to the divine safeguarding of his dominion:

²⁶⁵ SAA 9 8: 8–r. 1.

²⁶⁶ Although, there is no evidence that Elam ever ceased being a threat to Assyria during the reigns of either Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal.

²⁶⁷ SAA 9 7: r. 3–5. On a possible interpretation of the unique phrase *ḫallalatti enguratti*, see Parpola *Assyrian Prophecies*, 39; cf. CAD H 43, sub *ḫallalatti*.

²⁶⁸ Asb. A: iii 6.

²⁶⁹ SAA 9 1.4: ii 23; 2.2: i 19; 2.3: ii 5; 2.5: iii 23; 2.6: iv 9, 23; 7: r. 9–10.

²⁷⁰ SAA 9 1.2: i 34; 1.10: vi 22–23, 26; 2.1: i 6; 2.3: ii 11; 2.5: iii 19, 33–34; 2.6: iv 27; 6: 2–3; 11: r. 5.

²⁷¹ Although *taqānu* occasionally does have this nuance, note SAA 9 1.2: i 34; 2.3: ii 11.

SAA 9 2.5: iii 19, 33–34.

Ešarhaddon, Do Not Fear! I will secure the land of Assyria...

I will secure the land of Assyria. I will secure the kingship of heaven.

SAA 9 11: r. 5.

I will secure the lands.

Practically speaking, the ideas behind *našāru* and *taqānu* largely overlap despite their individual nuances. Both terms identify the king as their direct object and communicate that the deities will ensure no harm will come to him. The same message is also conveyed by the less frequently attested term *harādu* (“to guard, be alert”²⁷² as well as those metaphors which describe the king as “between the wings” (*bitri agappi*),²⁷³ “in the shade” (*ina šilli*),²⁷⁴ or “between the arm and forearm” (*birti izīri ammati*) of the deity.²⁷⁵ In all, the deities seek to assure the king that he is safe because they who established his kingship will shield and protect him.

Second, the deities pledge to intervene against the king’s enemies on his behalf, often in combination with these assurances. Acts of divine intervention may occur as violent meteorological phenomena like that which the deity Aššur promised (and delivered) against certain “traitors”:

SAA 9 3.3: ii 15–25.

I appeared²⁷⁶ as a fiery glow from the midst of the gate of heaven *that* I may cast down fire and make it consume them. You, yourself will stand in their midst. I removed (*them*) from your presence. I have driven them up the mountain. I have rained stones and fire upon them. I have broken your enemies. I have filled the rivers with their blood.

²⁷² SAA 9 1.4: ii 20; 1.6: iii 24, 29; 9: 18.

²⁷³ SAA 9 2.5: iii 27.

²⁷⁴ SAA 9 2.4: iii 17.

²⁷⁵ SAA 9 2.5: iii 30–31; 2.6: iv 22–23.

²⁷⁶ This translation follows Parpola (*Assyrian Prophecies*, 24) who understands the term *attaqallalla* in line 16 as a denominative form of *anqullu* (a portentous “fiery glow”) that indicates its appearance. Cf. W. von Soden, “Zum akkadischen Wörterbuch 50–53,” *Or* 20 (1951) 257–69.

More frequently, however, the deities employ terms and imagery familiar to conquest accounts which otherwise refer to the combative and punitive warfare of the king.²⁷⁷ Thus, the role of warrior that, in the royal inscriptions is usually reserved for the king, in oracles is transposed upon the deities who promise that they will “vanquish” (*kašādu*),²⁷⁸ “destroy” (*ḫalāqu*),²⁷⁹ “annihilate” (*gamāru*),²⁸⁰ “slaughter” (*ṭabāḫu*),²⁸¹ “scatter” (*sapāḫu*),²⁸² “flatten” (*sapānu*),²⁸³ “trample” (*kabāsu*),²⁸⁴ “crush” (*ḫepû*),²⁸⁵ “demolish” (*maqātu*),²⁸⁶ “put to an end” (*qatû*),²⁸⁷ “tear up the orchards of” (*šippūtu nasāḫu*),²⁸⁸ “set fire to” (*išātu emēdu*),²⁸⁹ “flay” (*kašû*),²⁹⁰ “impale” (*ana zaqībi šakānu*),²⁹¹ put “into neck stocks” (*ina šigaru*),²⁹² and “dissect” (*batāqu*)²⁹³ the king’s enemies.

²⁷⁷ For an analysis of the literary structures and syntagms commonly observed in Assyrian history writing, Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 61–124.

²⁷⁸ SAA 9 1.2: ii 7; 2.2: i 23; 2.5: iii 32; 3.5: iii 22, iv 17; 4: 6’; 11: r. 4; 13 37: r. 9. This term is attested *passim* in royal inscriptions.

²⁷⁹ ABL 839: r. 18. Cf. RINAP 3 24: vi 13’; 4 1: ii 11, 70; 2: i 18; 6: iii 15’.

²⁸⁰ SAA 9 2.3: ii 16; 7: 14; 8: r. 2. Cf. RINAP 3 24: vi 6’.

²⁸¹ SAA 9 1.2: i 32; 9: 26. Cf. RINAP 3 1: 23; 4 8: ii 24’.

²⁸² K.120B+: 24. Cf. RINAP 4 1: iii 59; 3 18: iv 6; 22: iv 53; 23: iv 46; 77: 33.

²⁸³ SAA 9 8: r. 1. Cf. RINAP 1 47: 22; 3 24: vi 12’; 34: 7; 4 1: ii 69; 6: ii 14’; 45: iv 5’; 127: 12’; 2003: ii 1’; 2004: 11’. Referring to a deity, see RINAP 4 104: ii 17; 105: ii 32; 114: iii 3;

²⁸⁴ SAA 9 2.1: i 12; 5: 7. RINAP 4 1: iii 47, iv 28, 44; 2: iv 18; 3: iv 17’; 7: iii’ 21’; 8: i’ 3’.

²⁸⁵ SAA 9 3.2: i 35–36; 8: e. 9. Cf. RINAP 1 49: 24’. See also *marāqu* (“to pulverize”) in SAA 3 13: r. 10.

²⁸⁶ SAA 3 31: r. 2. Cf. RINAP 1 35: i 35, 8’; 37: 9; 48: 44; 49: 9’, r. 17; *passim*.

²⁸⁷ SAA 9 1.6: iv 10. See Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 76.

²⁸⁸ SAA 9 2.5: iii 21; 10 284: r. 6–8. For a discussion on the destruction of orchards as a means of Assyrian warfare, see S. Cole, “The Destruction of Orchards in Assyrian Warfare,” in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the Tenth Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995*, eds. S. Parpola and R. Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997) 29–40.

²⁸⁹ SAA 9 3.2: ii 2. Cf. CAD E 144, sub *emēdu*. The idea of “setting fire” to enemy cities is more commonly expressed in the royal inscriptions with the verb *šarāpu/qamû*.

²⁹⁰ SAA 9 1.1: i 19. Cf. the fate of the rebellious Kirūa in RINAP 3 17: iv 86.

²⁹¹ SAA 9 3.5: iv 29–30. Cf. RINAP 1 8: 5; 20: 10’; 39: 10; 47: 16.

²⁹² SAA 9 1.2: ii 4; 2.5: iii 23. Cf. RINAP 4 1: iv 30; 6: iii 23’; Asb. A viii 11; B iii 2.

²⁹³ SAA 9 1.7: v 7; 2.4: iii 15; 8: 7. Cf. RIMA 2 A.0.101.1: i 117; 19: 82; RINAP 1 19: 3; CAD B 164, sub *batāqu*. In the royal inscriptions of Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, the term *batāqu* usually refers to the appropriation and reorganization of another kingdom’s territory following their defeat, see *passim* in RINAP 3 and 4.

Indeed, from “start to finish,”²⁹⁴ any action against threats to the kingship is by divine intervention in the oracles. The deities promise the king they will detect,²⁹⁵ apprehend,²⁹⁶ and kill (or handover)²⁹⁷ his enemies. The role of the king, in contrast, is a largely “quietist” one wherein he is told to “remain silent” (*lū qâlu*),²⁹⁸ “sit down” (*wašābu* G Impv.),²⁹⁹ or “stay seated on his throne” (*ina kussîšu lū ašib*)³⁰⁰ while the deities wage war on his behalf.³⁰¹ All this, of course, is representative of a robust ideology of divine warfare—reassuring the king that the deities will, unaided, duly oppose enemy chaos and restore the order which they had originally established.³⁰²

5.6.2 Oracles as Exhortations.

In addition to assuring the king of their support, the deities would also exhort him to perform various acts of cultic piety. A number of oracles attest a divine call for the king to “praise” (*nâdu*)³⁰³ the deity which, on one occasion, should be unceasing.³⁰⁴ In SAA 3 13, the king is repeatedly instructed to “fervently pray” (*maḥāru* Gtn) to Nabû,³⁰⁵ while, elsewhere, he is urged to “glorify” (*dalālu*)³⁰⁶ and

²⁹⁴ As the phrase “I will get up and sit down” (*atsbbi uššab*) in SAA 9 1.1: i 27 implies.

²⁹⁵ SAA 9 2.3: ii 9–10, 19–20; 2.4: ii 31–33.

²⁹⁶ SAA 9 2.1: i 11; 2.3: ii 20; 2.4: ii 33; 3.5: iii 24, iv 28; 10 174: r. 8.

²⁹⁷ Asb. A. iii 6–7; SAA 9 1.1: i 14; 2.4: ii 33; 3.3: ii 23; 4: 4; 5: r. 5.

²⁹⁸ SAA 9 2.4: iii 11.

²⁹⁹ SAA 9 11: r. 5.

³⁰⁰ SAA 10 111: r. 25.

³⁰¹ Only two oracles mention the warfare of the king: SAA 9 3.2: 28–34 and SAA 10 174: 14.

³⁰² For discussion on the ideology of divine warfare in Assyrian prophecy, see Nissinen, “Fear Not,” 148–58; C. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History* (BZAW 407; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009); J. Stökl, “‘I Have Rained Stones and Fiery Glow on Their Heads!’ Celestial and Meteorological Prophecy in the Neo-Assyrian Empire,” in *Thus Speaks Ishtar! Prophecy in Israel, Assyria and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period*, eds. R. Gordon and H. Barstad (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013) 239–52.

³⁰³ SAA 3 13: r. 11; 9 1.4: ii 33, 39; 1.10: vi 13, 18; 2.3: ii 21; 2.6: iv 8, 11; 3.3: ii 24;

³⁰⁴ SAA 9 1.10: 13–18 “Praise me! When the daylight decline, let torches flare! Praise me before them!” (*na²²idanni kî ūmu išīšūni zīqāti lukillū ina pāni na²²idanni*).

³⁰⁵ SAA 3 13: 9, 14–18.

“rejoice” (*rīšu*)³⁰⁷ in the deity speaking. Other more concrete material demands on the king include divine calls that he supply the deities with food and drink,³⁰⁸ “burnt offerings” (*maqaluāti*),³⁰⁹ and “wood groves” (*qablu*),³¹⁰ as well as restore their cultic statues and temples.³¹¹ Precisely what circumstances lay behind these requests is difficult to ascertain, although at least one oracle suggests that all of this could have been expected of the king who, in response to the divine support given to him, was obliged to reciprocate by honouring the deities and providing them with material support:

SAA 9 3.5: iii 16–37.

The word of Ištar of Arbela to Esarhaddon, King of Assyria. As if I had not done *or* given you *anything*! Didn’t I bend *and* give you the four door posts of Assyria? Didn’t I conquer your enemy? Didn’t I gather-up your foes *and* enemies like butterflies? *But* what did you give to me? There is no food for my banquet—as if *there was* no temple! I am being deprived of my food! I am being deprived of my drink! I am waiting, I have fixed *my* eye upon *them*. Indeed, Set up a bowl *with* one seah of food *and* a mug *with* one seah of fine beer *that* I may take *and* I may place *them* in my mouth, *so that* I may fill the cup, drink from it, *and* restore my *feminine* charms!

5.6.3 Summary.

In this section it has been shown that, through their oracles, the deities sought to encourage the Assyrian king by communicating their unwavering support for his kingship. The deities claim that it originally was they who ordained the king’s royal position and secured his rule over Assyria and its neighbors; accordingly, they promise to protect the king and defend his dominion against enemy attack. Threats to the kingship were both external and internal. Against

³⁰⁶ SAA 9 5: r. 6. For this translation, see Parpola (*Assyrian Prophecies*, 34) who interprets the term *dullā* as a G plural injunctive form of *dalālu*; also SAA 13 187: r. 12–13.

³⁰⁷ SAA 9 3.5: iii 14.

³⁰⁸ SAA 3.5: iii 26–37.

³⁰⁹ SAA 9 2.3: ii 25.

³¹⁰ SAA 13 144: r. 9.

³¹¹ Asb. A: vi 113–115; T: ii 33–35. Note also the reference to prophetic oracles in Assurbanipal’s account of his restoration of an Ištar (the “Queen of Kidmuri”) temple in Asb. T: ii 16.

these the deities promise they will unleash all manner of divine warfare on his behalf, and, apparently, without his involvement. Thus, the oracles emphasize divine victories rather than the king's achievements. Finally, given the reassuring loyalty of the deities to their king, it is also not surprising that the deities expected the king to reciprocate. A number of oracles illustrate that deities would exhort the king to undertake various kinds of cultic activity, sometimes even on behalf of other deities. In all, Neo-Assyrian oracles reflect the close relationship between the deities and their king.

5.7 Responses to Prophecy.

Audiences appear to have responded to prophecy in a variety of ways. At its most basic, audiences reported episodes of prophetic activity and the oracles they heard to the king. They did so, it seems, for two reasons: first, because they had a duty to report prophecy; and second, because they sought the king's evaluation on its content.³¹² For their efforts, the prophets evidently could expect some kind of recompense, while the addressees of oracles might respond by appealing to the deity themselves.

5.7.1 The obligation to report prophecy.

According to the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon, prophets who spoke messages inconsistent with the royal ideology could not be ignored.³¹³ Instead,

³¹² Nissinen (*References to Prophecy*, 37–38) and Huffmon (“A Company of Prophets,” 61) separately claim that another response was to subject prophecy to verification by the technical divinatory procedures of the *haruspex*, but in my view this is a misconception. The temple restoration account (Asb. T: ii 7–48) upon which Nissinen bases his claim is deceptively brief, and, while the account records that an extispicy was performed, it provides no explanation of how extispicy either relates to prophetic messages or functions in the account. Alternatively, the phrase *dullu šarru* [. . .] *ina muḥḥiṣa lēpūša* (SAA 16 59: r. 7–8; lit.: “may the king [. . .] perform a ritual upon her”) to which Huffmon points, is an unspecified ritual that does not usually refer to extispicy (see CAD D 173–77, sub *dullu*).

³¹³ It is interesting to note that there is no formal distinction between so-called “true” or “false” prophets in the Neo-Assyrian sources, except for certain ideological indicators which are left to the arbitrary opinion of the immediate audience to recognize (note the discussion on SAA 16 59–61

foreign vassals were obliged to report those responsible for such utterances to Assurbanipal the crown prince:

SAA 2 6 §10: 108–09, 116–122.

If you hear any evil, improper, ugly word which is not seemly nor good to Assurbanipal... from the mouth of a prophet, an ecstatic... you shall not conceal it but come and report it to Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, son of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria.

In addition to foreign vassals, if the arguments of Watanabe and Nissinen are to be accepted,³¹⁴ then the Succession Treaty and its explicit requirement to report on the seditious utterances of prophets was also imposed upon the citizenry of Assyria and Babylonia as well.³¹⁵ Certainly, at least, the language of this stipulation is in no way unique to the Succession Treaty. The phrase: “if you hear any evil, improper word... you shall not conceal it but come and report it...” (*šumma abutu lā ṭabtu lā de’iqtu tašammâni tupazzarâni lā tallakâninni lā taqabbâni*) merely repeats standard phraseology common to most Neo-Assyrian loyalty pacts, including those promulgated among the Assyrian citizenry.³¹⁶ In any case, seditious talk was clearly not to be tolerated, regardless of whether its source was divine or not, and loyal subjects were legally obliged to inform the king of anyone who was responsible for such murmurings including prophets.

below). To this extent, the situation in Neo-Assyria appears not unlike that which is extant in a number of passages outside of our Hebrew corpus and described by Grabbe (*Socio-historical Study*, 113–15, 118) who concludes “the concepts of true and false prophet represent theological value judgments”.

³¹⁴ K. Watanabe, *Die adê-Vereidigung anlässlich der Thronfolgeregelung Asarhaddons* (BaghMB 3; Berlin: Mann, 1987) 2–5; Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 116–17, 158. See also H. Tadmor, “Autobiographical Apology in the Royal Assyrian Literature,” in *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983) 43–45. Cf. Parpola who questions this view in Parpola and Watanabe, *Treaties*, XXIX–XXXI.

³¹⁵ The event is probably that one which is referred to in Assurbanipal’s royal inscriptions as having occurred at his investiture as crown prince: Asb. A: i 8–34 (= F: i 7–32).

³¹⁶ SAA 2 3: 2–4; 4: 4–7; 8: r. 3–7; 9: 13–16.

Correspondence from two officials to the king—written during the 671/670 conspiracy against Esarhaddon³¹⁷—suggests that fulfilling this obligation was taken very seriously as evidence of one’s loyalty. Nabû-reḫu-uṣur couches his letters SAA 16 59–61 in allusions to the Succession Treaty³¹⁸ and dutifully informs the king of a seditious utterance from a purportedly prophetic source.³¹⁹ He also denounces a number of people whose failure to report either the utterance or the events surrounding it suggested that, in contrast to himself, their loyalty lies not with the king but with the insurrection and its leader, Sasî.³²⁰

Another official, Adad-šumu-uṣur, whose letter SAA 10 199 was written shortly after the detection and crushing of the same insurrection,³²¹ defends his late reporting to Esarhaddon of a divine utterance. He explains that the delay in the king’s receipt of his report does not indicate disloyalty, for he is fully aware of his treaty obligations and has relayed the oracle immediately upon being informed of it.³²² Instead, the fault lies with the failure of others who had not informed the king despite themselves having knowledge of the oracle much earlier. Adad-šumu-uṣur records that their previous dithering has now resulted in their deaths—a punishment not undeserved according to the Succession Treaty from which he

³¹⁷ On the date and background of the conspiracy, see Dietrich, *Die Aramäer Südbabyloniens*, 50–55; Parpola, *LAS II*, 238–40; Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 127–135. Cf. J. A. Brinkman, “Notes on Arameans and Chaldeans in Southern Mesopotamia in the Early Seventh Century N.C.,” *Or NS* 46 (1977) 312–15.

³¹⁸ Nissinen (*References to Prophecy*, 116–127) suggests a traceable influence of the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon (SAA 2 6) on Nabû-reḫu-uṣur’s correspondence, especially SAA 16 59, the letter reporting pseudo-prophetic activity in support of the rebellion.

³¹⁹ SAA 16 59: r. 2–5.

³²⁰ In SAA 16 59: r. 6–s. 1, Nabû-reḫu-uṣur suggests the questioning of a number of people before he concludes that “those who conspire (*udû*) with them and with Sasî should die!”

³²¹ On the date and historical context of SAA 10 199, see Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 121, 238; Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 129.

³²² Adad-šumu-uṣur states explicitly that “now... (the informer) has spoken to me and I have reported to the king, my lord. In the treaty, is it not said in the treaty as follows...” (SAA 10 199: r. 16–21).

quotes³²³—although he also allows for the possibility that their fateful outcomes may be attributed to their violation of the oracle’s divinely imposed duty,³²⁴ concepts not mutually exclusive to one another.

5.7.2 Seeking the evaluation of the king.

There is also evidence that apprehensive Assyrian officials would sometimes report prophecies to the king in order to solicit his assessment of their difficult content. An initial example occurs in a letter to Esarhaddon from three officials charged with returning the statue of Marduk to Babylon. At the close of their letter they ask: “What is it that the king orders?” (*mīnu ša šarri iqabbûni*).³²⁵ The question is itself a common phrase and not limited to letters reporting prophecy.³²⁶ According to Nissinen, it expresses “that the writer is waiting for instructions of the king concerning the matter described in the letter.”³²⁷ In the present case, the matter the officials describe is a prophetic event, wherein one of the king’s servants claims to have spoken a message from a divine source:

SAA 10 24: r. 7–11.

He said, “The gods Bel and Zarpanitu have sent word to me: ‘Babylon is the loot of Kurigalzu.’”

The content of the oracle is clearly ominous, forewarning the plundering of Babylon, and, by implication, the capture of the Marduk statue they were now

³²³ Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 121.

³²⁴ In SAA 10 199: r. 5–10 the informer tells Adad-šumu-ušur: “The god told me, ‘If you do not tell, you will die; and if you tell it to somebody belonging to the entourage of the king, and he does not make it known in the palace, he will die.’ ...none of them told anything, and she and the others died.”

³²⁵ SAA 10 24: 17e–18e. There is no textual evidence for Parpola’s translation to add “our lord” after “the king” (*šarru*). On the historical context of this letter, see Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 32–35.

³²⁶ The question occurs frequently throughout the royal correspondence, for example: SAA 1 37: r. 12; 120: r. 5; 5 34: r. 20; 78: r. 14; 10 3: r. 13; 38: r. 2–3; 193: r. 4–5; 13 23: r. 2; 46: 10; 15 34: 8; 61: r. 14; 16 120: r. 7; 142: r. 3.

³²⁷ Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 141.

transporting.³²⁸ Thus, it posed a direct challenge to the Assyrian king's charge to safely return the cult statues of Babylon to their place of origin.³²⁹ Indeed, as much seems the interpretation of another member of their entourage, a 'third man' (*tašlišu*), who understood the oracle to imply that, if they were to continue southward, they would be attacked at Dur-Kurigalzu, a border town just inside Babylonia:³³⁰

SAA 10 24: r. 12–17e.

He said, "I know! Those robbers are waiting in Dur-Kurigalzu."

Faced with the precarious dilemma—either to heed the divine warning and proceed no further in defiance of the king's instructions, or, to disregard the divine warning and continue with their mission in obedience to the king—it comes as no surprise that the officials sought to refer a decision on the matter to the king himself.

A similar situation occurs in the letter of a temple official to Esarhaddon.³³¹ In SAA 13 37 Adad-aḥu-iddina writes: "Whatever the king, my lord, will command, so we will act accordingly" (*kī ša šarru bēli iqabbûni ina pitte nēpuš*). Adad-aḥu-iddina's statement is a variant on the question in the previous example and acts to affirm his loyalty to the king³³² as well as to signal his request for instructions from the king on

³²⁸ For this interpretation, see Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars. Part I*, 19; cf. G. Vera Chamaza, *Die Omnipotenz Aššurs: Entwicklungen in der Aššur-Theologie unter der Sargoniden Sargon II, Sanherib und Asarhaddon* (AOAT 295 Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002) 219.

³²⁹ Landsberger, *Brief des Bischofs*, 68; Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 32–35; Vera Chamaza, *Omnipotenz Aššurs*, 219; De Jong, *Isaiah*, 306.

³³⁰ On the Babylonian location of Dur-Kurigalzu, see Frame, *A Political History*, 287; H. Kühne, "Aqar Quf," *OEANE* 1: 156–57.

³³¹ On the identification of Esarhaddon as the recipient of this letter, see Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 329.

³³² Variations on the statement usually occur with preterite verbs (esp. *šapāru*) to express the writer's fidelity to the king's instructions; for example, SAA 1 47: r. 10–11; 53: 7; 135: 12–r. 1; 251: 6–7; 5 152: 23; 203: 15–16; 10 245: r. 4–5; 247: r. 1–2; 347: r. 7; 15 85: 9–10.

the prophetic event he has just reported.³³³ According to Adad-aḥu-iddina, the prophetess Mullissu-abu-uṣri had prophesied (*ragāmu*) that the royal throne should be released into her possession:

SAA 13 37: 11-r. 9.

The throne from the temple [break of five lines]

...let the throne go! I will catch the enemies of my king with it!

The oracle's content appears to have created quite a conundrum for Adad-aḥu-iddina. On the one hand, it represents a divine demand that, if obeyed, promises to produce positive benefits to the king. On the other hand, the use of the king's throne is the sole prerogative of Esarhaddon and it is to him that Adad-aḥu-iddina is immediately responsible for its protection.³³⁴ Further complicating the matter, Parpola dates the letter to the beginning of 670,³³⁵ an extremely sensitive period toward the end of the insurrection or in its immediate aftermath.³³⁶ Thus, it is understandable that, without the king's express permission, Adad-aḥu-iddina is reluctant to release the king's throne to someone who was already in possession of the royal regalia even if it they did claim to have divine authorization.³³⁷

5.7.3 Recompensing prophets.

With the occurrence of prophetic personnel in SAA 12 69, a decree of expenditures from the temple of Aššur, it may be inferred that prophets associated with cult centres—like others of the temple community—were routinely supported

³³³ The present-future tense of Durative verbal forms imply the official's anticipation of the king's instruction. The same phrase occurs in a broken context in SAA 10 293: 31–32.

³³⁴ In lines r. 10–11, Adad-aḥu-iddina writes that “without (the authorization of) the king, my lord, I shall not give the throne” (*ša lā šarri bēliya kussiu lā addan*).

³³⁵ Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars. Part II*, 329.

³³⁶ Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 127–35.

³³⁷ Adad-aḥu-iddina describes the prophetess as “conveying the king's clothes to the land of Akkad” (*kuzippī ša šarri ana māt Akkadī tūbilūni*), presumably for use in a Substitute King Ritual. See Nissinen, *References to Prophecy*, 79–81.

by temple food rations for their livelihood.³³⁸ Additionally, the administrative text ZT 13463 records a prophet (LU.GUB.BA) located at the city gate who received a surprisingly large payment of six minas of copper.³³⁹ According to Parpola,³⁴⁰ the text reflects an exceptional reward that was likely given for a particularly encouraging prophetic oracle which, in view of the text's inclusion of an augur,³⁴¹ had probably promised victory on the eve of battle.

5.7.4 Summary.

In this section it was shown that prophetic oracles were reported to the king because, ultimately, audiences were treaty-bound to do so. Under these circumstances, such a response becomes evidence of one's loyalty, while the opposite—the failure to report prophecy to the king—is an indication of one's culpability. Occasionally, officials could find themselves in the unenviable position whereby their compliance with an oracle's contents conflicted with their responsibilities to the king. In these situations, officials would diplomatically defer to the king's judgment, seeking his verdict on what should be their next course of action, rather than making an evaluation of their own. Lastly, it appears that although their livelihoods seem to have largely depended upon their connection to the temple, prophets could also be rewarded—sometimes generously—for the oracles they proclaimed elsewhere.

³³⁸ In this context, it is also worth noting that VS 19 1, a Middle Assyrian food rations list from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, records the distribution of cereals to various personnel associated with the Ištar temple, including prophets and prophetesses (*maḥḥu'ē* and *maḥḥu'āte*).

³³⁹ According to K. Radner the purchasing power of a copper mina corresponded to ten homers of barley or 1-2 camels, see idem, "Money in the Neo-Assyrian Empire," in *Trade and Finance in Ancient Mesopotamia*, ed. J. Dercksen (MOS Studies 1; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1999) 156.

³⁴⁰ Parpola, "Cuneiform Texts," 98–100.

³⁴¹ Parpola notes that "in the classical world, omens were routinely taken from the flight of birds on the eve of battle" (idem, "Texts from Ziyaret Tepe," 99).

This completes our analysis of prophecy in the Neo-Assyrian sources. On the general level, of course, the Neo-Assyrian phenomenon appears somewhat similar to its Mari forebears. It too could be prompted, was spoken by *maḥḥû* (Mari *muḥḥûm*) prophets, not limited to any one deity, is widely attested throughout Mesopotamia, occurred both inside and outside temples, was spoken aloud, encouraged the king, and its audiences were expected to report it. However, this general overlap belies significant differences between the two, something that will be investigated in further detail in chapter 8. Presently, we must turn to the phenomenon of prophecy in our third corpus, the Hebrew sources.

6. SOURCES FOR HEBREW PROPHECY.

Prophets and prophecy are attested extensively throughout most of the Hebrew Bible.¹ Admittedly, even a minimal accounting of every occurrence is quite beyond the scope of this study so that a more modest corpus of Hebrew material is necessary.

In a recent study, R. Russell Mack has compared the Hebrew prophetic books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah to Neo-Assyrian prophecy on the grounds that “these three books, traditionally dated to the 7th century B.C.E., are where one would expect to find the greatest degree of correspondence between Assyrian and biblical prophecy.”² The differences between them, he concludes, leads to dating the biblical material to the post-monarchic era. To this extent, Mack’s aims are essentially historical, using the Neo-Assyrian materials to date the Hebrew phenomenon.

As interesting as Mack’s conclusions are, the comparative approach is not widely considered an appropriate methodology for dating an individual phenomenon,³ unless, of course, an overall diachronic pattern can be clearly shown

¹ There are more than 330 attestations of the term “prophet(ess)” (נביא) attested in 27 of the 39 canonical books of the Hebrew Bible.

² Mack, “Comparative Analysis,” i.

³ For an extensive summary of the history of research of this methodological problem, especially as it relates to the dating of the patriarchal narratives, see M. Selman, “Comparative Customs and the Patriarchal Age,” in A. Millard and D. Wiseman eds., *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1980) 93–138; J. Miller, “The Patriarchs and Extra-Biblical Sources: A Response,” *JSOT* 2 (1974) 62–66. Regarding the use of comparative features to date historical texts, K. Younger summarises the key difficulty lies where “there are no controls on determining the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* for the use of such motifs in one culture let alone establishing their use in another culture” (idem. *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 261–63).

— something impossible with prophecy, where surviving materials remain scarce.⁴ Nevertheless, his choice of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah is of obvious interest to an understanding of Hebrew prophecy and one may ask to what degree these and the other purportedly preexilic prophetic books compare or contrast with the corpora of ancient Mesopotamia — not only the Neo-Assyrian, but also the Old Babylonian materials.

Of course, the term “preexilic” is frequently considered to be somewhat of a misnomer in the historical assessment of certain prophetic books, and the present study has no aspirations to wade deeply into the argument. Indeed, given the heuristic aim of this study, which is to seek a “contextual” understanding of the various phenomena — focusing upon the typologies of prophecy rather than attempt to answer diachronic questions — exact precision on the dating of a Hebrew book is not even seen to be an altogether necessary precondition for a valid comparison (or contrast) to be noted.⁵ Consequently, in this chapter I will outline a Hebrew corpus of prophetic books which maintains at least a reasonable amount of recent scholarly support for a preexilic dating, if only to justify the use of the term.

Secondly, it should also be noted that while there is a certain amount of arbitrariness on the choice of prophetic books on which to focus in this study, nevertheless such a selection of sources is permissible so long as one does not conclude more than the evidence indicates, even as Malul and others have reminded.⁶ Accordingly, although the accounts of prophetic activity elsewhere in the biblical record (such as Samuel and Kings) could also provide further useful

⁴ A situation quite incomparable to the study of ancient Near Eastern treaties, where the plethora of materials available have permitted a comprehensive pattern of the literary form to be plausibly reconstructed. See K. Kitchen and P. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*. 3 Vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012).

⁵ As W. Hallo has previously been at pains to explain and demonstrate (see esp. idem, *Origins: The Ancient Near Eastern Background of Some Modern Western Institutions* [SHCANE 6; Leiden: Brill, 1996])

⁶ See the earlier discussion on comparative methodology and its abuses in Section 1.3.

comparisons (and contrasts), due to the limited scope of this study only occasional reference will be made to them.

In addition to Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, our corpus of Hebrew sources includes the following prophetic books.

6.1 Hebrew Bible.

- Amos. Prior to the work of W. Schmidt in the mid-1960s,⁷ there was little doubt for dating Amos to the eighth century. Subsequent work by Mays,⁸ Wolff,⁹ and Koch,¹⁰ among others, further questioned the preexilic character of various passages. In the past few decades, however, these views have come under strong criticism for being overly atomistic and disregarding clear evidence that the passages they identify as postexilic are often integral to the structures of the larger sections wherein they are found.¹¹ Consequently, there are few today who would not consider most of Amos to originate with the prophet and his disciples.¹²
- Habakkuk. For most,¹³ the mention of the “Chaldeans” (כשדים) (1: 6) and the book’s literary unity is sufficient to locate Habakkuk and his oracles sometime

⁷ W. Schmidt, “Die deuteronomistische Redaktion des Amosbuches: Zu den theologischen Unterschieden zwischen dem Prophetenwort und seinem Sammler,” *ZAW* 77 (1965) 168–93.

⁸ J. Mays, *Amos: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1969).

⁹ H. Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos* (Hermeneia; Fortress, 1977).

¹⁰ K. Koch, *The Prophets*, 2 vols. (London: SCM, 1982–83).

¹¹ For example, see J. de Waard, “The Chiastic Structure of Amos V, 1–17,” *VT* 27 (1977) 170–77; N. Tromp, “Amos V 1–17: Towards a Stylistic and Rhetorical Analysis,” *OTS* 23 (1984) 65–85. A more comprehensive argument for the structural unity of Amos can be found in K. Möller, *A Prophet in Debate: The Rhetoric of Persuasion in the Book of Amos* (JSOTSup 372; London: Sheffield Academic, 2003).

¹² A notable exception is J. Jeremias (*The Book of Amos: A Commentary* [OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998]) who considers the book of Amos to be largely postexilic and that whatever material is original to Amos is virtually irretrievable.

¹³ For a survey of previous attempts to date Habakkuk, see M. Johnson, “The Paralysis of Torah in Habakkuk 1:4,” *VT* 35 (1985) 257–60.

in the late preexilic period, possibly just prior to the defeat of Egypt by the Babylonians at Carchemish in 605 B.C.E.¹⁴

■ Hosea. Despite some notable recent exceptions,¹⁵ there is a settled consensus among scholars that the core of the oracles and narrative material in Hosea was original to the eighth century prophet and his disciples.¹⁶ Some disagreement does exist over whether the allusions to Judah in several oracles were integral to Hosea's message to Israel¹⁷ or if they represent subsequent Judean interpolations following the collapse of the northern kingdom.¹⁸ In either case, however, such allusions are to be regarded as preexilic.

■ Proto-Isaiah. Since the end of the nineteenth century it has been usual practice to refer to Isa. 1–39 as a complex pastiche that, besides the writings of an original eighth century Isaiah of Jerusalem, also contains material from a number of exilic and postexilic authors. In line with recent scholarship on this section, it is largely uncontroversial to ascribe the bulk of chapters 1–33 to Isaiah of Jerusalem.¹⁹ As for the remaining chapters, Hugh Williamson has attempted to argue that they represent a more-or-less coherent redactional layer to be identified with Deutero-Isaiah and a nucleus of earlier original material.²⁰ However, Williamson's views on this section have received only a

¹⁴ K. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (NAC 20; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999) 259.

¹⁵ For example, E. Ben Zvi, *Hosea* (FOTL 21A/1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

¹⁶ For overviews on the authorship of Hosea, see J. McConville, "Hosea, Book of," *DOTP* 338–50; C. Seow, "Hosea, Book of," *ABD* 3: 291–97.

¹⁷ D. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel* (NAC 19A; Nashville: Broadman Press, 1997) 24.

¹⁸ W. Schmidt, *Old Testament Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. de Gruyter, 1999) 204; G. Davies, *Hosea* (OTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993) 104–5; B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 377–78; H. Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) XXXI–XXXII.

¹⁹ With the exception of chapters 24–27, the so-called "Isaiah Apocalypse," which are often considered to represent a postexilic interpolation. See W. Millar, "Isaiah 24–27 (Little Apocalypse)," *ABD* 3: 488–90.

²⁰ H. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

mixed response and remain largely unsuccessful in shifting the scholarly consensus that it represents a later, postexilic, interpolation.

- Joel. Lacking reference to a king in the superscription and without any clear historical description in the content of its oracles,²¹ Joel has been variously dated. Much of previous scholarship has considered Joel to be postexilic largely on the basis of its purported disunity and allusions to later geopolitical circumstances.²² Recent studies have greatly revised this view, however, providing persuasive evidence for Joel's literary unity²³ as well as arguing that the book's geopolitical references and physical descriptions of Jerusalem are best understood in the late preexilic period, after the fall of Samaria.²⁴
- Micah. Up until fairly recently, the dominant view was that only Micah 1–3 could reasonably be connected to the eighth century prophet. The remaining four chapters (4–7) were considered later interpolations, dating perhaps to the exilic or even postexilic periods.²⁵ Shifts in methodology,²⁶ however, have

²¹ It is worth noting that, like Joel, the prophetic book of Jonah also lacks any specific historical information that could aid in dating the book's composition or the time of the protagonist's activity. As a result, Jonah has been dated to the exilic or postexilic periods on various grounds, including: Linguistic features, subject matter, intertextual parallels, and historical exaggerations or inaccuracies. Despite recent attempts to contradict these claims, Jonah will not be considered in this study except where certain features are observed in the footnotes. For a concise summary and response to the various historical charges, see D. Stuart, *Hosea—Jonah*, (WBC 31; Waco: Word Books, 1987) 440–42; and, more recently, J. Walton, "Jonah," in *Daniel—Malachi*, eds. T. Longman and D. Garland (EBC, rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) 454–56.

²² Two helpful summaries of previous scholarship on the postexilic dating of Joel are: T. Hiebert, "Joel, Book of," *ABD* 3: 873–80; E. Assis, "The Date and Meaning of the Book of Joel," *VT* 61 (2011) 163–83.

²³ D. Marcus, "Nonrecurring Doublets in the Book of Joel," *CBQ* 56 (1994) 56–67; W. Prinsloo, "The Unity of the Book of Joel," *ZAW* 104 (1992) 66–81.

²⁴ Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 284–94.

²⁵ For reviews on the late-nineteenth and twentieth century scholarship responsible for establishing this view on the composition history of Micah, see K. Jeppesen, "New Aspects of Micah Research," *JSOT* 8 (1978) 3–32; "How the Book of Micah Lost Its Integrity: Outline of the History of the Criticism of the Book of Micah with Emphasis on the 19th Century," *ST* 33 (1979) 101–31; D. Hagstrom, *The Coherence of the Book of Micah: A Literary Analysis* (SBLDS 89; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

emphasized the book's literary and rhetorical coherence,²⁷ thereby significantly challenging the previous consensus and permitting a new trend that affirms the book's contents as consistent with the period of its purported author.²⁸

▪ Nahum. While there appears to be some who still prefer a purely diachronic approach to Nahum, and, so, consider parts of the book to be later interpolations,²⁹ the influence of such readings appears to be diminishing.³⁰ In its place, almost all who favour a synchronic reading—and even some of those who don't³¹—are “convinced that the book in its entirety, or at least the vast majority of its textual constituents, can be safely ascribed to the prophet himself.”³²

▪ Zephaniah. With a few notable exceptions,³³ most date the bulk of the book of Zephaniah to the preexilic period, if not specifically the “days of Josiah” as

²⁶ Represented by the study of J. Willis, “The Structure, Setting and Interrelationships of the Pericopes in the Book of Micah” (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1966).

²⁷ Examples include: J. Willis, “Thoughts on a Redactional Analysis of the Book of Micah,” *SBLSP* 13 (1978) 87–107; L. Luker, “Beyond Form Criticism: The Relation of Doom and Hope Oracles in Micah 2–6,” *HAR* 11 (1987) 285–301; Hagstrom, *Coherence*, 115–28.

²⁸ F. Andersen and D. Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24E; New York: Doubleday, 2000); M. Jacobs, *The Conceptual Coherence of the Book of Micah* (JSOTSup 322; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001). Cf. E. Ben Zvi, *Micah* (FOTL 21B; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

²⁹ K. Seybold, *Profane Prophetie: Studien zum Buch Nahum* (SBS 135; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989); *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephania* (ZBK 24/2; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991); T. Lescow, “Die Komposition der Bücher Nahum und Habakuk,” *BN* 77 (1995) 59–85.

³⁰ For excellent surveys of the trends in recent scholarship on the book of Nahum, see M. Weigl, “Current Research on the Book of Nahum: Exegetical Methodologies in Turmoil?,” *CRBS* 9 (2001) 81–130; K. Spronk, “Acrostics in the book of Nahum,” *ZAW* 110 (1998) 209–22; “Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches to the Book of Nahum,” in *Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis*, ed. J. Moor (OTS 34; Leiden: Brill, 1995) 159–86.

³¹ Even among those who hold to a more strictly diachronic approach tend to consider chapters 2–3 to reflect the authentic prophetic oracles of the seventh century prophet.

³² Weigl, “Current Research,” 82.

³³ Whilst L. Smith and E. Lacheman (“The Authorship of the Book of Zephaniah,” *JNES* 9 [1950] 137–42) claimed Zeph. 1: 4–13 to be authentic to the prophet, they assigned the remainder to 200 B.C.E.!

per the superscription. According to M. Boda,³⁴ even where some have identified varying amounts of later interpolations,³⁵ they have done so by simply focusing on “contrastive themes” within the oracles.³⁶ For many others, however, such modulations actually underlie the unity of the messages of Zephaniah’s oracles and so provide no hindrance to concluding that their authorship rests with the prophet.³⁷

6.2 West-Semitic Extra-Biblical Sources.

Outside of the Hebrew Bible, several important references also attest to preexilic prophetic activity in the Levant:

- Lachish Ostraca 3, 16. Lachish 3,³⁸ a Hebrew ostrakon contains a complete letter written to Yaʿuš, the military commander at Lachish, from Hošaiah, a junior officer. In lines 19–21 (rev. 3–5) Yaʿuš refers to “a letter of Tobiah, which came to Šallum, from the prophet, saying ‘beware’” (*wspr . ṭbyhw ʿbd . hmlk . hbʿʿl . šlm . bn ydʿ . mʿt . hnbʿ . lʿmr . hšmr*). Lachish 16,³⁹ a rather poorly preserved fragment, makes a clear reference to “the prophet” (*hnbʿ*) in line 5.
- Zakkur Stela.⁴⁰ The Zakkur Stela is an Old Aramaic monumental inscription in which Zakkur, the king of Hamath and Luʿaš, claims to have been

³⁴ M. Boda, “Zephaniah, Book of,” *DOTP* 899–907.

³⁵ For example, see P. Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); W. Holladay, “Reading Zephaniah with a Concordance: Suggestions for a Redaction History,” *JBL* 120 (2001) 671–84; E. ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah* (BZAW 198; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991).

³⁶ The themes that Boda identifies include: eschatology/present; universality/particularity; enemy/diaspora (idem, “Zephaniah,” 900).

³⁷ A. Berlin, *Zephaniah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25A; New York: Doubleday, 1994) 20–23; J. Motyer, “Zephaniah,” in *The Minor Prophets*, ed. T. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 3: 901–4; E. Achtemeier, *Nahum—Malachi* (IBC; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986) 62.

³⁸ KAI 193; F. Dobbs-Allsopp, et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) 309–14.

³⁹ Dobbs-Allsopp, et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, 331.

⁴⁰ KAI 202.

miraculously delivered from a siege following divine promises communicated to him by “seers” (*ʿddn*) and “visionaries” (*ḥzyn*).

7. Hebrew Prophetic Phenomenon.

In this chapter I will briefly investigate the phenomenon of prophecy in the preexilic Hebrew oracular sources using the same categories which have already been applied to the Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources. Admittedly, most of the Hebrew material—if not all—has already received the attention of numerous commentators and, although these categories have been originally adopted from Mesopotamian sources (i.e. Mari),¹ there seems little controversy with either the categories or of the observations made below.

7.1 What Prompted Prophetic Oracles?

Before discussing the ways in which human actors could prompt prophetic oracles, it is worth briefly noting that, in the context of preexilic Hebrew prophecy, divine utterances occasionally appear to have been purely unsolicited and the result of divine initiative.² Indeed, in several episodes oracles were given even when their human audience or the prophetic mediator had refused or opposed their delivery.³ More typically, what motivated a prophetic episode is not clearly indicated, other than that which is presented in the content of oracles and can be inferred from the spoken concerns of the deity,⁴ a point to which we shall return to later in section 7.6.

¹ See section 2.3.

² For example, see Amos 7: 15; Isa. 6: 9; 7: 3.

³ Amos 2: 12, 7: 12–16; Isa. 7: 10–11 (note also Jon. 3–4).

⁴ No narrative information is given for what prompted the oracles in Zephaniah, Nahum, and Micah. In contrast, the prophets in Joel 2: 18–19 and Hos. 4: 1, indicate that the deity spoke as a result of his aversion to certain circumstances, something Yahweh himself also makes explicit in Jon. 1: 2.

A number of terms associated with prophecy convey the sense that oracles could often be solicited by petitioning the deity directly or through the indirect agency of an intermediary.

7.1.1 “Praying” to the Deity (פָּלַל).

Prayer appears to be the least ambiguous mode for soliciting divine utterances. Amos and Habakkuk each intercede to YHWH on behalf of their nations, both receiving oracular responses from their deity.⁵ Although not strictly part of our corpus, it seems also worth noting that in Isa. 37 the prophet Isaiah is instructed by Hezekiah, the Judean king, to “lift a prayer” (נָשָׂא תְּפִלָּה) to his deity in anticipation of a divine response.⁶ Unique to this account, moreover, Hezekiah himself is recorded as having “prayed” (פָּלַל) to the deity directly.⁷ In due course, the deity responds through oracles in all three instances,⁸ the second and third of which are explicitly introduced as divine answers to the prayers of the king.⁹

All of this is not to suggest that divine utterances were mechanically induced through the use of prayer. Indeed, Isa 1: 15 and 16: 12 suggest that attempts to solicit the deity could occasionally be unsuccessful as well.

7.1.2 “Inquiring” of the Deity (שָׁאַל דָּרַשׁ).

A number of examples indicate that the deity had, in fact, expected to be consulted and even invited inquiries, not least on important matters relating to

⁵ Amos 7: 2–3, 5–6; Hab. 1: 2–11, 1: 12–2: 5. Alternatively, it is worth noting that Jonah twice prays to YHWH on his own behalf. The first time (Jon. 2: 2–10) Jonah reportedly does so from within a large fish; YHWH responds by “vomiting” out (קִיא) the prophet before eventually speaking to him (Jon. 2: 11–3: 2. The masculine subject of קִיא is unclear, though it presumably refers to the fish). Jonah’s second prayer, apparently uttered in anger, prompts an equivalent divine riposte (Jon. 4: 1–4).

⁶ Isa 37: 2–4; The use of an apodosis waw in the formation of the king’s speech to the prophet strongly suggests that Hezekiah’s call for prayer expresses a (logical) consecution. J-M §119e, 176k.

⁷ See Isa 37: 15 and 38: 2.

⁸ Isa. 37: 6–7, 21–35, 38: 4–8.

⁹ Isa. 37: 21 “because you prayed to me” (אֲשֶׁר הִתְפַּלַּלְתָּ אֵלַי); 38: 5 “I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears” (שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־תְּפִלָּתְךָ רָאִיתִי אֶת־דְּמְעָתְךָ).

foreign affairs. According to YHWH in Isa 30: 1–2, rather than “going down to Egypt” (מִצְרַיִם רִדֶּת) to “make an alliance” (נִסְךְ מִסְכָּה)¹⁰ with that land, the Judeans should “inquire” (שָׁאֵל)¹¹ of him instead. A similar contrast occurs again in Isa 31: 1, where YHWH bemoans that, having already aligned themselves with Egypt, the Judeans now no longer “consult” (דָּרַשׁ)¹² him. In Isa 7: 10–11, king Ahaz refuses YHWH’s invitation to “inquire” (שָׁאֵל) of him with regards to Judah’s aggressive neighbors—apparently a disastrous scenario that, in the context of the northern kingdom, shall soon lead to their demise.¹³

Of course, this is not to suggest that just because YHWH was not consulted, the people refused to avail themselves of any divine counsel. Rather, according to YHWH, inquiries were not directed toward him because the people of Judah and Israel preferred to inquire of other deities whose responses were solicited through various forms of divination other than prophecy.¹⁴

7.1.3 “Calling/crying out” to the Deity (שׁוֹעַ זַעַק).

Finally, several texts point to the possibility that prophetic oracles could also be solicited by calling or crying out to the deity. The prophet Habakkuk had “called (for help)” (שׁוֹעַ) and “cried” (זַעַק) to YHWH who keenly replies to his lament and “answers” (עֲנָה) the prophet’s criticisms through divine utterances.¹⁵ Alternatively,

¹⁰ Lit. “to pour out a libation” referring to the official action in concluding an agreement. See HALOT, מִסְכָּה, 605; W. Beuken, *Isaiah Chapters 28–39* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 2000) 134.

¹¹ Beuken (*Isaiah*, 153) considers this to possibly be an example of “institutional inquiry made by temple functionaries.”

¹² Note the parallel term “to look” (שָׁעָה) which occurs in the previous clause and in Isa. 17: 7–8 where it probably refers to soliciting YHWH as well as cultic objects. See HALOT, שָׁעָה, 1610; H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) 175–79.

¹³ In Isa. 9: 12–13 YHWH bemoans that because the people of Israel “did not consult (דָּרַשׁ)” him they will be “cut off” (כָּרַת).

¹⁴ Including via the agency of necromancy, mediums, and idols. See Isa. 8: 19, 19: 3; Hos. 4: 12.

¹⁵ Hab. 1: 2–2: 20. In a similar fashion, the prophet Jonah purportedly “called” (קָרָא) and “cried” (זַעַק) out to YHWH anticipating that the deity would “answer” (עֲנָה) him and “respond” (שָׁמַע) to his voice; the deity duly doing so only in the following chapter (see Jon. 2: 3, 3: 1–2).

reference to “crying out” (זעק) to YHWH in Micah 3: 4, however, demonstrates that, along with prayer and inquiry, this mode of soliciting the deity provided no guarantee of successfully receiving an oracle—only the prerogative of the deity could assure an answer.

7.1.4 Summary.

According to our Hebrew sources, in addition to being prompted by divine initiative alone, prophecy could also be given in response to three modes of human supplication. First, on an number of occasions, the deity utters prophetic oracles in reply to prayer (פלל) from prophets and, possibly, the king himself. Second, the deity both welcomed and expected to be consulted (דרש שאל). Third, instances of prophets “calling out” (שויע) as well as “crying” (זעק) to the deity apparently could also prompt the deity to “answer” through prophetic oracles. However, none of these modes was mechanical and a prophetic response from YHWH was by no means guaranteed, thus contributing, arguably, toward the people’s tendency to consult non-Yahwistic deities through mantic activity other than prophecy, as is also recorded in the Hebrew sources.

7.2 Prophets in the Hebrew Sources.

7.2.1 Identifying Prophets.

There are two terms which denote prophetic speakers in our Hebrew sources: חֹזֶה and נָבִיא.¹⁶ The first of these, a *qatīl* pattern of the root נבא,¹⁷ is usually accepted to represent a substantivised form with the passive meaning of “one who has been

¹⁶ A third term, רֹאֶה, occurs in Isa. 30: 10 parallel to חֹזֶה, a term with which it is generally held to be synonymous.

¹⁷ On this form, see J-M §88E.b; J. Fox, *Semitic Noun Patterns* (HSS 52; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003) 192–94.

called” and is the term most frequently translated as “prophet.”¹⁸ The second, a *qātil* form, is a Qal active participle based on the verbal root חזה that refers to “one who sees” and serves as a *nomen opificis* to denote a “seer.” Despite being etymologically distinct, in practice, use of these terms so frequently overlap in the sources that they are considered to be largely synonymous.¹⁹

It’s worth noting that speakers of divine utterances are rarely, if ever, associated with these prophetic titles in the sources.²⁰ More often, they are identified simply by name and may occasionally be accompanied by additional genealogical²¹ or topographical²² references. Unusually, the prophet Amos is even described by his occupation as a “shepherd” (נֹקֵד), though he himself specifically claims to be a “herdsman” (בֹּקֵר) and a “dresser of sycamore figs” (בֹּלֵס שְׁקָמִים).²³

Prophets are almost exclusively men, with the unique exception of an anonymous “prophetess” (נְבִיאָה) attested in Isa. 8: 3. Presumably on the basis of the title’s context, Wildberger and Oswalt consider the prophetess to be Isaiah’s wife.²⁴ Blenkinsopp cautions against this interpretation, however, not least but because

¹⁸ There has been some debate as to whether נְבִיא etymologically represents an active or passive form. For a clear outline and discussion of contrasting positions on this issue, see Fleming, “Etymological Origins,” 217–24; “Syrian Religious Personnel,” 175–83; Huehnergard, “Etymology and Meaning,” 88*–93*.

¹⁹ Wilson (*Prophecy and Society*, 254–56) attempts to draw a clear distinction between them. Nevertheless, both terms are interchangeably associated with their respective verbal forms, such that “prophets” and “seers” are both able to “prophesy” as well as “see.”

²⁰ Only Habakkuk (Hab. 1: 1; 3: 1) and, possibly, Isaiah (Isa. 37: 2; 38: 1; 39: 3) are explicitly identified by the title “prophet” (נְבִיא). In Amos 7: 12, Amaziah is quoted as referring to Amos as a “seer” (חֹזֶה), though, according to Andersen and Freedman (*Amos*, 771), the context makes it unclear if this comment was neutral or pejorative.

²¹ Hos. 1: 1; Isa. 1: 1; Joel 1: 1; Zeph. 1: 1; note that this also occurs with Jonah in 2 Kgs. 14: 25.

²² Micah is said to come from Moresheth (Mic. 1: 1, 14). According to 2 Kgs. 14: 25, Jonah is from Gath-hepher.

²³ Amos 7: 14. For discussion of these terms, see T. Wright, “Did Amos Inspect Livers?” *ABR* 23 (1975) 3–11; “Amos and the ‘Sycomore Fig’,” *VT* 26 (1976) 362–68.

²⁴ H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12: A Continental Commentary* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1991) 337; J. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 223.

there is no textual basis for it.²⁵ Since Jepsen,²⁶ commentators generally consider the prophetess to have functioned as such in her own right, comparable to Huldah in 2 Kgs. 22: 14, and, possibly, was also an official in the temple or cult.²⁷

7.2.2 Characteristics and Functions of Prophets.

Prophets are frequently presented as members of the ruling elite who wielded significant influence. Indeed, the immediacy of Isaiah's contact with the royal court, not to mention the accounts of his audiences with Judah's sovereigns, certainly imply as much.²⁸ Moreover, in Isa. 3: 1–3 prophets are listed alongside a number of publicly recognized offices described as Judah's "support and stay" (מִשְׁעָן וּמִשְׁעָנָה)²⁹ and the nation's "leadership" (Pi. Pcp. אֲשֵׁר).³⁰ In Isa. 9: 13–15 (Eng. 9: 14–16), prophets occur together with "elders and honoured men" (זִקְנֵי וְגִשְׁוֹא־פָנִים) in the antinomy "head and tail" (רֹאשׁ וְזֵנָב) to proverbially convey all "those who lead this people" (מְאַשְׁרֵי הָעַם-הַזֶּה). The same totality is also expressed where prophets variously occur beside "rulers" (קִצְיֹן), "officials" (שָׂרִ), and "magistrates" (שֹׁפֵט) in Mic. 3: 1–11 and Zeph. 3: 3–4.

Whereas these public offices functioned in the context of the royal administration, however, the prophets are characterized in relation to the cult. Prophets are closely paired with the "priests" (כֹּהֲנִים) in Isa. 28: 7 and Hos. 4: 4–5 as well as in the last of the above references, Zeph. 3: 3–4, where they represent the nation's ecclesiastical leaders. In Amos 2: 11–12 prophets are paired with

²⁵ J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 238.

²⁶ A. Jepsen, "Die Nebiah in Jes 8:3," ZAW 72 (1960) 267–68.

²⁷ For an early assertion of this view, see A. Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1962) 66 n. 2.

²⁸ Isa. 7 (note also the parallels within chapters 37–39).

²⁹ On this unique phrase, see H. Williamson, *Commentary on Isaiah 1–5* (ICC; London: T & T Clark, 2006) 232.

³⁰ Isa. 3: 12.

“Nazirites” (נָזִיר), an apparent “religious technical term”³¹ that refers to persons of significant influence through their spiritual leadership and potential aristocratic links.³²

In addition to their connections to the religious apparatus, prophets are described as the deity’s “servants” (עֲבָד) in Isa. 20: 3 and Amos 3: 7, the latter also claiming that “the lord God does nothing without revealing his secret” (לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה אֱדֹנָי) (יְהוָה דִּבֶּר כִּי אֶסְגֶּלָה סוֹדוֹ) to them. They are likened to “guards” (שָׁמָר)³³ and “watchmen” (צִפְּהָ/מְצַפֶּה)³⁴ who, being with the deity,³⁵ are divinely entrusted to act as Israel’s “eyes” (עֵינַי)³⁶ in order to warn and awaken the nation of approaching danger. Along these lines, the prophets are said to be the divine means by which YHWH led Israel out of exile,³⁷ now cares for Israel,³⁸ and will eventually “hew” (חָצַב) and “slay” (הָרַג) Israel to produce in its people a love and knowledge of the deity.³⁹

7.2.3 Summary.

In this section it was shown that prophets, known by the synonymous titles חֹזֶה and נָבִיא, were considered by their contemporaries as influential members of

³¹ E. Tov, “Loan-Words, Homophony, and Transliterations in the Septuagint,” *Bib* 60 (1979) 231.

³² For a recent study on the Nazirite tradition, see S. Chepey, *Nazirites in Late Second Temple Judaism: A Survey of Ancient Jewish Writings, the New Testament, Archaeological Evidence, and Other Writings from Late Antiquity* (AJEC 60; Leiden: Brill, 2005). On the aristocratic connections of the Nazirites, see N. Avigad, “The Burial-Vault of a Nazirite Family on Mount Scopus,” *IEJ* 21 (1971) 185–200.

³³ Isa. 21: 11–12.

³⁴ Hos. 9: 8a; Isa. 21: 6. Admittedly, there are significant textual issues present in Hos. 9: 8. For the most part, however, efforts to make sense of the verse continue to maintain the view that the title “watchman” refers to the prophet. For discussions and various resolutions of the problems, see R. Dobbie, “The Text of Hosea IX 8,” *VT* 5 (1955) 199–203; Wolff, *Hosea*, 151, 157–58; Zvi, *Hosea*, 193; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 140, 146.

³⁵ Hos. 9: 8a.

³⁶ Isa. 29: 10.

³⁷ Hos. 12: 14 (Eng. 12: 13).

³⁸ Hos. 12: 14 (Eng. 12: 13).

³⁹ Hos. 6: 5.

the ruling class, differing from those in the royal administration by their characterization in relation to the religious apparatus and, more importantly, their close connection to the deity.

7.3 Prophetic Deities in the Hebrew Sources.

7.3.1 YHWH.

Whilst our sources refer to a wide variety of deities, spiritual beings, and cultic practices, only the divine utterances of YHWH—the divine majordomo of ancient Israelite religion—are recorded.⁴⁰ The plain name YHWH (יהוה) is frequently attested speaking oracles, though it often also occurs in conjunction with a multiplicity of terms and phrases that serve to particularize his divine character. Typically, these are formulaic, as with the subsequent addition of “hosts” (צבא), “God” (אלהים), or both. At other times, such additions could be further augmented by any of the following: references to YHWH’s past actions on behalf of Israel,⁴¹ his relation to Israel and its monarchy,⁴² particular theological motifs,⁴³ the addition of a possessive suffix,⁴⁴ or, by preceding the divine name with the term “lord” (אדני) or “king” (מלך).⁴⁵ It is perhaps indicative of the term’s lack of specificity and weakness for misidentification that “g/God” (אלהים־אֵל) is almost never used alone to introduce divine speech.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ For studies on “orthodox Yahwism” among the multiplicity of religious practices in ancient Israel, see R. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001); P. Miller, Jr., *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

⁴¹ For example: Hos. 12: 10 (Eng. 12: 9), 13: 4; Isa. 17: 6, 21: 17, and possibly 37: 21.

⁴² Isa. 10: 20, 21: 10, 30: 15, 38: 5; Joel 4: 17 (Eng. 3: 17).

⁴³ Amos 9: 5–6; Hab. 1: 12; Isa. 19: 1.

⁴⁴ Hos. 1: 7; 3: 5; Isa. 7: 11; Joel 1: 14; 2: 26–27; 4: 17 (Eng. 3: 17) (“who dwells in Zion”); Zeph. 2: 7.

⁴⁵ The term מלך occurs only in Isa. 6: 5, otherwise אדני occurs rather frequently, particularly in Amos (3: 7–8, 11; 4: 2; 5: 3; 6: 8; 7: 1, 4; 8: 1, 9, 11; 9: 5), but also in Isaiah (7: 7; 28: 16).

⁴⁶ Notable exceptions include Isa. 1: 10, 28: 26 (also Jon 4: 9).

7.3.2 Deities other than YHWH.

Despite there being no oracles attributed to deities other than YHWH, they are hardly absent from the Hebrew sources either. Generic reference to deities other than YHWH is frequently made by the use of the term אֱלֹהִים in such phrases as “other gods” (אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים),⁴⁷ “their gods” (אֱלֹהֵיהֶם),⁴⁸ “gods of the nations” (אֱלֹהֵי הַגּוֹיִם),⁴⁹ “gods of the lands” (אֱלֹהֵי הָאָרְצוֹת),⁵⁰ and “gods of GN”.⁵¹ Like YHWH, these deities may also be cited by name,⁵² although with regard to the term “a/Asherah” (אֲשֶׁרָה) uncertainty remains over precisely what is denoted.⁵³ References to “handmade” idols often occur in the sources and are identified by terms that either reflect their means of manufacture⁵⁴ or are derisive.⁵⁵ Among these, especially noteworthy are several allusions to the use of such objects in unspecified divinatory

⁴⁷ Hos. 3: 1.

⁴⁸ Isa. 37: 19.

⁴⁹ Isa. 36: 18, 37: 12.

⁵⁰ Isa. 36: 20, 37: 19; also “gods of the earth” (אֱלֹהֵי הָאָרֶץ) in Zeph. 2: 11.

⁵¹ Isa. 36: 19; also “her gods” (אֱלֹהֵיהָ) in Isa. 21: 9 referring to the deities of the city (fem.) of Babylon.

⁵² “Sikkuth” (סִכּוּת) and “Kayyam” (כַּיָּאָם) in Amos 5: 26; “Nisroch” (נִסְרוֹךְ) in Isa. 37: 38; “Milcom” (מִלְכָּם) in Zeph. 1: 5; “Amon” (אֲמוֹן) in Nah. 3: 8; “Baal” (בַּעַל) in Hos. 2: 10, 15, 18–19 (Eng. 2: 8, 13, 16–17), 11: 2, 13: 1; Zeph. 1: 4. For discussion on these epithets and their equivalents elsewhere in the ancient Near East, see the relevant entries in *DDD*.

⁵³ Isa. 17: 8, 27: 9; Mic. 5: 13 [Eng. 14]. The Hebrew term אֲשֶׁרָה can refer to either cultic objects (pl. אֲשֶׁרִים) or to the goddess “Asherah”—the consort of El at Ugarit. For discussion on the uncertain identification of a/Asherah, see N. Wyatt, “Asherah אֲשֶׁרָה,” *DDD* 99–105.

⁵⁴ The terms פָּסָל (Hab 2: 18; Nah. 1: 14) and פָּסִיל (Hos. 11: 2; Isa. 10: 10, 21: 9, 30: 22; Mic. 1: 7, 5: 12 [Eng. 13]) refer cult objects that have been “carved” (פָּסַל); צֶלֶם (Amos 5: 26) is derived from a verb possibly associated with the action of “cutting” or “inscribing” (see A. Livingstone, “Image צֶלֶם,” *DDD* 448–50); עֲצָב (Hos. 4: 17, 8: 4, 13: 2, 14: 9 [Eng. 8]; Isa. 10: 11; Mic. 1: 7) and עֲצָב (Hos. 10: 6) are terms related to the verb “to shape/ form” (עָצַב); מִסְכָּה (Hab 2: 18; Hos. 13: 2; Isa. 30: 22; Nah. 1: 14;) refers to an idol cast by “pouring” (נָסַךְ) molten (precious) metals.

⁵⁵ The term אֲלִיל (Hab 2: 18; Isa. 2: 8, 18, 20, 10: 10–11, 19: 1, 3, 31: 7) can be literally translated as something which is “useless”, “worthless”, or “insignificant” (see *HALOT*, אֲלִיל, 55). According to Hos. 10: 5, the location of the Samaritan “calf” (עֵגֶלָה) statue is not at Beth-el, as expected, but “Beth-Aven” (בֵּית אֲוֵן), a name which might literally be translated as the “house of iniquity.” It is possible that the statue itself may be what is referred to in Amos 8: 14 as “the guilt of Samaria” (אֲשַׁמַּת שֶׁמְרוֹן). In Hos. 9: 10, the Moabite Baal of Peor is referred to as that “thing of shame” (בִּשְׁת) and an “abhorrence” (שִׁקּוּץ).

practices to exact audible responses.⁵⁶ Something similar may also be implied in Isa 8: 19 where there is reference to inquiries made to the “dead” (מֵתִים) through “necromancers” (יִדְעָנִי) who “chirp and mutter” (הַמְצַפְצָפִים וְהַמְהַגִּים) and “spirit mediums” (אֹיִב)⁵⁷ that, according to Isa 29: 4, were known to speak with a “voice” (קוֹל).

7.3.3 Summary

In this section it was noted that only the oracles of YHWH are recorded in the Hebrew sources. In light of this situation, it is tempting to conclude that only YHWH spoke divine utterances. Nevertheless, occasional allusions to audible responses produced during divinatory inquiries made to deities other than YHWH do serve to counterbalance this image and hint that prophecy in ancient Israel and Judah was not solely restricted to YHWH. Perhaps a better explanation for YHWH’s prophetic dominance lies in the fact that YHWH is often presented as the sole deity worthy of legitimate worship—a theme made evident in the contempt shown toward other deities and the idols (their material representatives) as well as those who worship and inquire of them.⁵⁸

7.4 Location of Prophecy.

Remarkably little is mentioned in the Hebrew sources with regard to where prophetic activity took place. On the rare occasions where locations are specified, they broadly reflect that oracles could be delivered in both cultic and non-cultic venues.

⁵⁶ Hos. 4: 12 records that divinatory inquiries were made to idols of “wood (עֵץ)” and were “answered by their staff” (מִקְלֵי יָגִיד); Hab 2: 18–19 derides the expectation that man-made idols could actually “teach” (יִרֶה), referring to them instead as “dumb vanities” (אֱלִילִים אֶלְמִים) and stones (אֲבָן) that are “silent” (דּוֹמָם).

⁵⁷ These personnel are attested again in Isa. 19: 3 where, together with idols and “ghosts” (אֲטִים), they receive divinatory inquiries.

⁵⁸ To be discussed further in Section 7.6.

7.4.1 Cultic Locations.

Despite frequent reference to the cultic sphere in the content of oracles, cultic locations themselves are mentioned in only a couple of places. Perhaps the clearest indication that prophetic activity did occur within the context of the cult is to be found in Amos 7: 10–13. According to the prophetic narrative, Amaziah, a priest (כהן) at Bethel, had written to king Jeroboam complaining of Amos’s activity “in the midst of the house of Israel” (בְּקֶרֶב בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל). Although the phrase could simply indicate the high public profile of Amos’s utterances⁵⁹—a point of particular concern in the following clause⁶⁰—commentators usually take it as a reference to the cult center known to have been located at Bethel.⁶¹ Less ambiguous is Amaziah’s subsequent charge that Amos should “never again prophesy at Bethel for it is the royal sanctuary (מִקְדָּשׁ-מֶלֶךְ) and the state temple (בֵּית מִמְלָכָה),” where מִקְדָּשׁ-מֶלֶךְ and בֵּית מִמְלָכָה refer to Bethel’s unique designation “as both a national and a royal shrine.”⁶²

A possible second reference to the cultic context of prophetic activity occurs with Isaiah’s use of the term “temple” (הֵיכָל) at the start of the account of his prophetic commission. According to 6: 1, Isaiah saw “the Lord who was sitting upon a throne and who was high and lifted up; the train of his robe filled the temple,” (אֲדֹנָי יֵשֵׁב עַל-כִּסֵּא רָם וְנִשָּׂא וְשׁוּלָיו מְלֵאִים אֶת-הַהֵיכָל). M. Sweeney argues that such imagery depicts a concrete setting for the oracle and that, through this and

⁵⁹ For a discussion on the meaning of this phrase in the context of Amos, see F. Andersen and D. Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24A; New York: Doubleday, 2008) 635.

⁶⁰ Amos 7: 10b “the land is unable to endure all his (Amos’) words” (לֹא-תוּכַל הָאָרֶץ לְהִכִּיל אֶת-כָּל-דִּבְרָיו).

⁶¹ Andersen, *Amos*, 766; B. Smith and F. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman Press, 1995) 136–37; S. Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991) 239. Cf. Jeremias, *Amos*, 48; D. Block, “Israel’s House: Reflections on the Use of בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל in the Old Testament in the Light of its Ancient Near Eastern Environment,” *JETS* 28 (1985) 261; Wolff, *Amos*, 164. For Bethel, see J. Kelso, “Bethel,” *NEAHL* 1: 192–94.

⁶² Alternative understandings of these terms are discussed by Andersen (*Amos*, 775) and Paul (*Amos*, 243).

subsequent verses, Isaiah is referring to the location where the ark resides in the Jerusalem temple's inner sanctuary as well as the ceremonial events that are associated with the Day of Atonement.⁶³ Alternatively, J. Watts interprets the imagery in 6: 1–8 somewhat less literally. He suggests that it refers to a figurative heavenly location, the throne room of the divine assembly, though he also concedes that 6: 6–7 parallel “the sacrifices which were needed to enter the Temple.”⁶⁴ Finally, J. Oswalt proposes what amounts to a compromise between the two, suggesting that, in fact, “it is unimportant whether Isaiah was in the actual temple at the time of the event. In his vision he was there and the reader is with him.”⁶⁵

7.4.2 Non-cultic Locations.

In addition to cult centers, Hebrew prophets were apparently active at various other locations as well. According to Isa 7: 3 divine utterances could be delivered in public locations. YHWH instructs Isaiah to “go out to meet Ahaz... at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer’s Field” (צֶא־נָא לִקְרֹאת אָחָז) (... יָשׁוּב בְּנֶגֶד אֶל־קֶצֶה הַתְּעֹלֶת הַבְּרֶכֶה הָעֲלִיזָנָה אֶל־מִסְלַת שְׂדֵה כּוֹבֵס). Although the exact location of the upper pool remains somewhat debated,⁶⁶ it could hardly have been a discreet place for the prophetic delivery of a divine reprimand.⁶⁷ Indeed, Isaiah’s inflectional shift from the use of singular to plural forms indicates that his utterance targeted a larger audience. Interestingly, the same location occurs twice again in Isa 36: 1–20 as the purported venue for where Sennacherib’s chief

⁶³ M. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39: With an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (FOTL 16; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 139–40. See also C. Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993) 54.

⁶⁴ J. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* (WBC 24; Dallas: Word Books, 1985) 71–74.

⁶⁵ Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 177.

⁶⁶ M. Burrows, “The Conduit of the Upper Pool,” *ZAW* 70 (1958) 221–27; cf. R. Amiran, “The Water Supply of Ancient Jerusalem,” in *Jerusalem Revealed: Archaeology in the Holy City 1968–1974*, ed. Y. Yadin (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1975) 75–78; J. Gray, *I & II Kings* (OTL; Westminster: Philadelphia, 1970) 679–82.

⁶⁷ Contra Watts who suggests that it represents a place where the confrontation “would not be as public as it would have been in the court” (idem, *Isaiah 1–33*, 91).

spokesman addresses not only the city's official delegation but also "the people sitting on the wall" (הַאֲנָשִׁים הַיֹּשְׁבִים עַל־הַחוֹמָה), doing so in a "loud voice" (קוֹל גָּדוֹל) and in "the language of Judah" (דְּבַר + יְהוּדִית), even citing divine words purportedly spoken to the Assyrian from YHWH their deity (Isa 36: 10b).

Only in Isa 38: 1 and 39: 3, references otherwise from outside of our sources, is it recorded that a prophet could gain private audience with the king, Isaiah having "come" (בּוֹא) and "spoken" (אָמַר) a divine utterance to Hezekiah on two separate occasions. In neither of these, however, is there any record of where these meetings took place. If accurate, the first presumably occurred within the intimate confines of the royal bed chamber, the king being reportedly so ill that he was "at the point of death" (לְמוֹת) when Isaiah was divinely instructed to attend to him (Isa 38: 1). From the immediate context (Isa 39: 1–2) it may be inferred that the second meeting took place at the palace as well.

Among our sources, Hebrew prophets appear to have been active only within their own lands. An interesting exception to this, however, occurs outside of our immediate corpus and is worth noting. According to Jon 3: 2, despite Jonah's initial reluctance, he eventually arrived in the Assyrian city of Nineveh and proclaimed a message that, for some unknown reason, his foreign audience attributed to "God" (אֱלֹהִים). Nineveh apparently is the venue for Jonah's first dialogue with YHWH (Jon 4: 1–4); a second dialogue (Jon 4: 5–11) also ensues after the prophet "exits" (יֵצֵא) Nineveh and "sits to the east of the city" (וַיֵּשֶׁב מִקְדָּם לְעִיר).

7.4.3 Summary

In contrast to the limited number of locations specified in the sources, this section has demonstrated that the venues for prophetic activity were enormously varied. Hebrew prophecy could occur in either cultic or non-cultic contexts; publicly and, possibly, privately; within the homeland of Israel (northern or

southern kingdoms); and, if the account of Jonah is given any credence, even away in foreign (hostile) lands.

7.5 Prophetic Means for Delivering Oracles in the Hebrew Sources

In the Hebrew sources, the conveyance of prophetic divine messages to their human addressees entails a relatively clear two-step process of revelation and intermediation. The first of these denotes the transmission of oracles from the deity to the prophet. The second, from the prophet to the oracle's designated audience. In both steps a number of terms are employed to describe several modes of transmission, each of which will be discussed in this section.

FROM PROPHET TO AUDIENCE.

7.5.1 Audible Speech.

Despite the obvious fact that the Hebrew sources are themselves in written form, their contents indicate that the primary means by which prophets conveyed oracles was by oral transmission. Prophets are frequently described as having “spoken” (דבר/אמר) to a divinely designated audience, verbally quoting to them the “word of YHWH” (דבר-יהוה).⁶⁸ They are also said to “warn” (עוד),⁶⁹ “announce” (נגד),⁷⁰ “prophesy” (נבא),⁷¹ and “preach” (נטף)⁷² oracles, all of which are terms usually associated with the activity of speaking.⁷³ Attestations of the more nuanced term

⁶⁸ Amos 1: 2; Hos. 2: 3 (Eng. 2: 1); Isa. 6: 9; 7: 4, 13; 37:6; 39: 5, 8; Mic. 3: 1 (note also Jon. 3: 4).

⁶⁹ Amos 3: 13.

⁷⁰ Isa. 21: 10; Mic. 3: 8.

⁷¹ Amos 7: 2: 12; 3: 8; 7: 12–13, 15–16; Joel 2: 28. The denominative verb נבא has the meaning “act as a נביא” and occurs in these instances with a commonly attested nifal form. Note Amos 7: 16 where נבא occurs in parallel with נטף. See H.-P. Müller, “נביא,” *TDOT* 9: 129–50.

⁷² Amos 7: 16; Mic. 2: 6, 11.

⁷³ Since the end of the nineteenth century, there have been innumerable attempts to associate נבא with ecstaticism, yet none appear to have gained widespread consensus. Recent approaches have sought to identify the ecstatic character of the Hebrew phenomenon by locating it within a matrix of socio-anthropological categories, constructed from modern ethnographic research. Despite their appeal, however, such attempts fail to resolve many of the same problems that scuttled earlier

קרא (“to call out loud”) suggest that the prophets would even amplify their voices when in a crowd.⁷⁴ Indeed, that prophetic utterances were clearly audible to their audiences is hardly a moot point. Various combinations of the summons to “hear” (שמע), “listen carefully” (קשב), and “give ear” (אזן) frequently preface oracles,⁷⁵ even as they also occur in the ultimatum of Sennacherib’s herald when he purportedly spoke aloud to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Isa. 36: 13, 16).

7.5.2 Writing.

Several verses indicate that the Hebrew prophets could commit divine messages to writing: Hab. 2: 2; Isa 8: 1; 30: 8. Three features are common to each of these accounts. First, prophetic writing is clearly at the behest of the deity; the repetition of the divine imperative to “write!” (כתוב) indicates as much.

Second, in each instance the divinely prescribed manner of writing ensures it was for public readership rather than personal record. Habakkuk was to write the oracle “plainly” (באר), that is, legibly,⁷⁶ “in order that (any)one can read it easily” (למען ירוץ קורא בו).⁷⁷ Isaiah, Isa. 8: 1, was to invite two witnesses, one of whom was a “priest” (כהן), and write on “a large (papyrus) sheet” (גליון גדול)⁷⁸ with “a soft stylus”

research, namely the lack of consensus on the definition of “ecstatic experience/ecstasy” and the difficulty of identifying the phenomenon in ancient and non-clinical texts. In his eponymous socio-historical study of religious specialists, Grabbe himself acknowledges as much, even admitting that “much of the time, we have no idea how the prophet received the divine message” (idem, *Socio-historical Study*, 111). It seems surprising, therefore, that he concludes by confidently insisting that “we have no right to deny such [ecstatic] experiences categorically to Israelite prophets.”

⁷⁴ Hab. 2: 2; Jon. 3: 2, 4; Mic. 3: 5.

⁷⁵ שמע: Amos 3: 1, 9 (+אמר); 4: 1, 5; 5: 1; 7: 16; 8: 4; Hos. 4: 1; Isa. 7: 13; 28: 14; 39: 5; Mic. 3: 1, 9; 6: 1; Nah. 2: 1 (Eng. 1: 15). שמע + קשב: Mic. 1: 2. שמע + אזן: Isa. 1: 2, 10; 30: 21; 32: 9; Joel 1: 1.

⁷⁶ R. Haak, *Habakkuk* (VTS 44; Leiden: Brill, 1992) 55–56; Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 106.

⁷⁷ Lit. “so that one who reads aloud will run with it.” Here, I follow the interpretation of W. Rudolph (Micha, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah [Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1975] 211–12). Cf. J. Holt, “‘So He May Run Who Reads It’,” *JBL* 83 (1964) 298–302; F. Andersen, *Habakkuk: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 204–5.

⁷⁸ See HALOT, גליון, 193.

(חֶרֶט אָנוֹשׁ),⁷⁹ apparently in order that the idiomatic four word oracle could be easily read by passers-by once it was posted up on a wall in the temple.⁸⁰ The idea of calling people to see the prophet's writing occurs again in Isa. 30: 8 where Isaiah is instructed to write "in their presence" (אִתָּם)⁸¹ so that the oracle (מִשְׁאֵל), which started in verse 6, may now be a "witness" (עֵד) against his audience.

Third, in contrast to the claim by K. van der Toorn that these verses reflect that prophetic writing was "confined to communicating a message to their contemporaries,"⁸² the accounts themselves claim that the oracles were not written for the present but for posterity. According to YHWH, the prophesied destruction which Habakkuk records is far from imminent and "still awaits its appointed time" (עוֹד חִזּוֹן לְמוֹעֵד). In fact, it will be so long before the events are fulfilled that YHWH reassures the prophet that the oracle is not "failing" (כּוֹזֵב) and "if it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay" (אִם-יִתְמָקְמָה חֲכֵה-לּוֹ כִּי-בֹא יָבֹא לֹא יֵאָחֵר). As for Isaiah, Isa. 8: 3–4 indicates that the prophet himself was unaware of the extent of the divine message at the time of writing and becomes only partially aware of its meaning some time later after the birth of his son. Several years would eventually separate the events prophesied and recorded from their fulfillment.⁸³ Finally,

⁷⁹ Various interpretations of the phrase חֶרֶט אָנוֹשׁ (lit. "a man's stylus") appear to pivot upon scholarly proposals on the vocalization of the second word (BHS: אָנוֹשׁ). This translation follows the interpretation of F. Talmage ("חֶרֶט אָנוֹשׁ in Isaiah 8: 1," *HTR* 60 [1967] 465–68.) who, accepting H. Gressmann's emended reading אָנוֹשׁ (*Der Messias* [FRLANT 43; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929] 239 n. 1), understands the term in light of Akkadian and Arabic cognates to suggest that the phrase is a technical term referring to a broad nibbed and flexible brush capable of making bold strokes. Cf. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 331–32; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 237–38.

⁸⁰ K. van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) 180.

⁸¹ Lit. "with them"; for this translation, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 414; Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 548 n. 1.

⁸² Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 179–82.

⁸³ For an attempt to estimate the duration of time between the oracle's receipt and fulfillment, see Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 222–23.

Isa. 30: 8 explains that the written oracle “will be an everlasting witness for a future day” (וְתִהְיֶה לְיוֹם אֶחָד לְעַד עַד-עוֹלָם).

7.5.3 Symbolic Actions.

In addition to being transmitted orally as well as in written form, prophets were occasionally instructed to communicate divine messages through symbolic acts. Perhaps the most extreme form of this are the divine calls for the prophets to publicly appear “naked” (עָרוֹם) and “barefoot” (יָחַף/שִׁלִּיל) in Isa. 20: 1–6 and Mic. 1: 8–9; on both occasions, the performative act of the prophets represented a threatening and humiliating captivity.⁸⁴ A less explicit though just as symbolically charged practice was the naming of children with encoded prophetic messages. On three separate occasions (and possibly a fourth)⁸⁵ the deity himself instructs the prophets on the naming of their children: Hos 1: 6 (לֹא רַחֲמָה “No Mercy”), 9 (לֹא עַמִּי “Not my people”); Isa. 8: 3 (מִהֵר שָׁלַל חֶשׁ בָּז “Speeding to the plunder, hurrying to the spoil”); all of which are followed by explicative clauses introduced by the conjunctive particle כִּי.⁸⁶

FROM DEITY TO PROPHET.

7.5.4 Audible Divine Speech.

According to the Hebrew sources, audible speaking was the primary mode by which the deity transmitted their divine messages. This is initially indicated by the ubiquitous and formulaic phrases “thus says YHWH” (כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה),⁸⁷ “the utterance of YHWH” (נִאֲמַם-יְהוָה), and their variants, all of which are usually found accompanying oracles. Such expressions can be said to mirror the practices of

⁸⁴ Note the attestations of גִּלָּה (“to be deported/go into exile”) in each of Isa. 20: 4 and Mic. 1: 16.

⁸⁵ Isa. 7: 3 שְׁאָר יָשׁוּב “A remnant will return.”

⁸⁶ J-M §170d; IBHS §39.3.1d.

⁸⁷ Similar to this is the infrequently attested phrase “for (the mouth of) YHWH has spoken” (כִּי [פִּי] נִאֲמַם-יְהוָה); Isa. 1: 2, 20; 21: 17; 22: 25 (+נִאֲמַם-יְהוָה); 25: 8; Mic. 4: 4.

messengers who deliver royal decrees.⁸⁸ Alternatively, the deity is also often recorded to have “spoken” (דבר/אמר) to prophets,⁸⁹ the king,⁹⁰ or to (his) people.⁹¹ It is noteworthy that, in his attempt to persuade, even the Assyrian Rabshakeh purportedly claimed that the deity of Judah had verbally addressed him.⁹²

Sometimes, however, the deity appears to speak to no particular audience and only the content of the oracle is presented.⁹³ On a few occasions the intermediary function of the prophets themselves is singled out and the deity is described as having “spoken through PN” (PN + דבר ב[יד]; lit. “by the hand of PN”).⁹⁴ Divine verbal discourse is also indicated by a variety of more nuanced terms. YHWH is said to “swear an oath” (שבוע),⁹⁵ “command” (צבה),⁹⁶ “call out loud” (קרא),⁹⁷ “answer” (ענה),⁹⁸ and “announce” (נגד).⁹⁹ Finally, the audibility of the divine speaker’s speaking is confirmed by references to oracles being “revealed” (גלה)¹⁰⁰ in the prophet’s “ears” (אזן)¹⁰¹ and to prophets having “heard” (שמע) the “voice” (קול)¹⁰² and “decree” (חרץ)¹⁰³ of the deity.¹⁰⁴

⁸⁸ Note the similar use of כה אמר at the start of the speeches of the Assyrian and Hebrew royal messengers in Isa. 36: 4, 14, 16; 37: 13.

⁸⁹ Amos 7: 8, 15; 8: 2; Hab. 2: 1; Hos. 1: 2, 4, 6; 3: 1; 12: 11 (Eng. 12: 10); Isa. 8: 1, 3, 5; 38: 15; (note also Jon. 3: 2; 4: 9).

⁹⁰ Isa. 7: 10; 38: 15.

⁹¹ Isa. 28: 11; Joel 2: 19.

⁹² Isa. 36: 10. Note that, despite his purported proficiency in the local “Judahite” dialect, the formulation of his claim “YHWH spoke to me” (יְהוָה אָמַר אֵלַי) is rarely attested in biblical Hebrew (Deut. 31: 2; Psa. 2: 7).

⁹³ Amos 3: 1, 8; Hab. 2: 2; Isa. 3: 16; 6: 8, 9; 7: 3; 10: 13; 20: 3; 16: 13–14; 24: 3; 37: 22; 38: 7; Mic. 3: 5; 6: 1 (note also Jon. 4: 4, 10).

⁹⁴ Hos. 1: 2; 12: 11 (Eng. 12: 10); Isa. 20: 2. A unique reference, Isa. 28: 11 should also be included with these examples.

⁹⁵ Amos 4: 2; 6: 8 (+ נאם); 8: 7, 14; Isa. 14: 24 (+ אמר).

⁹⁶ Isa. 34: 16 (+ פיהוה); Nah. 1: 14.

⁹⁷ Amos 7: 4; Isa. 22: 12; Mic. 6: 9 (קול).

⁹⁸ Hos. 2: 23; Hab. 2: 2 (+ אמר); Joel 2: 19 (+ אמר); Mic. 3: 7 (“no answer”).

⁹⁹ Isa. 21: 2. Whilst it cannot be ruled out, it is unclear if a second attestation of נגד in Hos. 4: 12, where the subject of the verb is “walking stick” (מקל), refers to a coherent audible reply.

¹⁰⁰ Amos 3: 7; Isa. 22: 14.

¹⁰¹ Isa. 5: 9.

7.5.5 Visual Transmission.

In addition to divine speech, oracles are often also described as having been visually transmitted by the deity. According to the prophet Amos, YHWH had “shown” (Hif. ראה) him oracles on a number of occasions,¹⁰⁵ all of which, it seems, were combined with audible divine speech.¹⁰⁶ Something akin to this is apparently anticipated in Habakkuk (2: 1) where the prophet announces, “I will look out to see what (the deity) will say to me” (אֶצְפֶּה לְרֹאוֹת מִהַיִּדְבָּר־בִּי). Similarly, in the description of his commissioning, Isaiah claims to have both “seen” (ראה) and “heard” (שמע) YHWH.¹⁰⁷ In contrast, Isaiah’s opponents command “Do not see” (לֹא תִרְאוּ) apparently keen that the prophets should only “speak to us pleasant words” (דַּבְּרוּ-לָנוּ חֲלָקוֹת).¹⁰⁸ Lastly, a number of the superscriptions also allude to the visual transmission of prophetic oracles by introducing them as that which had been “seen” (חזוה) by the prophet concerned.¹⁰⁹

7.5.6 Summary

In this section it was shown that the primary means for conveying oracles was by oral transmission. Prophets also communicated divine messages through symbolic acts and they committed oracles to writing, though such instances are recorded only occasionally in the sources. By speaking to his audience an audible divine message, the prophets themselves apparently were mediating oracles in much the same way that they admit to having received them in the first place.

¹⁰² Isa. 6: 8 (+ אמר).

¹⁰³ Isa. 28: 22.

¹⁰⁴ In Isa. 21: 10, שמע is also attested without a direct object in a relative clause: “what I have heard from YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel, I announce to you” (אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתִּי מֵאֵת יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (הַגִּדֹּתִי לָכֶם).

¹⁰⁵ Amos 7: 1, 4, 7; 8: 1.

¹⁰⁶ Amos 7: 8; 8: 2; 9: 1.

¹⁰⁷ Isa. 6: 1, 5.

¹⁰⁸ Isa. 30: 10.

¹⁰⁹ Amos 1: 1; Hab. 1: 1; Isa. 1: 1; 2: 1; 13: 1; Mic. 1: 1.

According to the prophets, the deity spoke to them and the oracles were audible. Terms which usually describe visible events sometimes also frame the divine message, though their occurrence together with verbs of speaking in a number of these instances suggest that their wider semantic meaning “to perceive” is probably what was meant.¹¹⁰

7.6 The Content of Prophetic Oracles.

Admittedly, it is not possible here to provide anything like an exhaustive analysis of all the divine speeches in the Hebrew sources, nevertheless several themes are addressed on a recurring basis and I will attempt to sketch an overview of their content in this section.¹¹¹

7.6.1 Indictment.

The geopolitical tumult that characterized the Levant in the period prior to Judah’s exile is a frequent topic in the Hebrew prophetic sources. Foreign nations are divinely indicted in a number of oracles for their betrayal and cruel treatment of

¹¹⁰ Contra Grabbe (*Socio-historical Study*, 108, 145–48), who insists on the basis of various Mari dream reports that occurrences of חזה and ראה in Hebrew prophetic contexts retain an element of visual revelation through dreams. Notwithstanding the overlap between the contents of some dreams and prophetic oracles at Mari, nevertheless these remain two separate divinatory modes, as evidenced by the corpus itself. Dream oracles were usually the result of incubatory techniques performed upon “lay people” to induce divine messages (On dream incubation, see: Durand, *Archives*, 461; Butler, *Dreams and Dream Rituals*, 217–40). Accordingly, ARM 26 232 appears as a notable exception to prove the rule: “Dagan, your lord, appeared to me in a dream, even though nobody had performed an incubation ritual (*liptum*) on me.” Alternatively, the Mari “professional” prophets (ie those bearing prophetic titles) can claim that the deity has directly spoken to them without the need for recourse to any such framework. Of course, this does not preclude the possibility that, where divine messages are introduced by חזה and ראה, the Hebrew prophets may have relied upon inductive techniques to obtain their oracles, yet there is simply no clear evidence for it.

¹¹¹ The following categories cannot help but overlap somewhat with the seminal work of Westermann who maintains that prophetic speech contains two basic parts, an “accusation” (here corresponding to 7.6.1) and an “announcement” (see 7.6.2). According to Westermann, however, only the second of these is presented as divine speech (*Basic Forms*, 132), a dubious point contradicted by many of the example texts that he utilizes. For a more thorough critique on Westermann’s genre categories, see G. Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

Israel as well as their own ideological hubris. In Amos (1: 3–2: 5), Isaiah (13–23), and, to some extent, also Joel (3: 4–19), such oracles are arranged in a series; the deity cataloging numerous injustices inflicted upon the northern kingdom by various nations both near and far. Nahum and Habakkuk, on the other hand, are largely devoted to the divine accusations against Israel’s enemies, Assyria and Babylon, respectively. It is worth noting that, in addition to reproaching foreign nations for their actions against the nation of Israel as a whole, the oracles occasionally also refer to the sufferings of ordinary people, even if only schematically.¹¹²

Notwithstanding the intensity with which the foreign nations are reproached, divine invective seems especially reserved for Israel and its leaders. Most ubiquitously, the deity accuses them of cultic neglect and unauthorized practices.¹¹³ The people are disloyal¹¹⁴ and defiant,¹¹⁵ they have forgotten¹¹⁶ and forsaken YHWH,¹¹⁷ their veneration of him is perfunctory,¹¹⁸ and they are spiritually dull.¹¹⁹ Rather than fidelity to YHWH and his ways the people of Israel reject his word,¹²⁰ they adopt illicit cultic practices,¹²¹ purported to include human sacrifice,¹²² and

¹¹² E.g. Amos 1: 13.

¹¹³ For a recent survey of the textual and archaeological evidence for the eclectic religious traditions practiced in Israel during the first millennium B.C., see Hess (*Israelite Religions*) and Zevit (*Religions of Ancient Israel*).

¹¹⁴ Amos 2: 9–11; 9: 7; Isa. 5: 1–4; Mic. 6: 1–5.

¹¹⁵ Isa. 3: 8.

¹¹⁶ See שָׁכַח in Hos. 2: 15 (Eng. 2: 13); 4: 6; 8: 14; 13: 6; Isa. 17: 10.

¹¹⁷ See עָזַב (“to forsake”) in Hos. 4: 10; Isa. 1: 4, 28; מָנָה + אָחָר (“[to depart] from [following]”) in Hos. 1: 2; 4: 12; 9: 1; Zeph. 1: 6; נָדַד (“to stray [from]”) in Hos. 7: 13; מְשֻׁבָּה (“falling away”) in Hos. 11: 7.

¹¹⁸ Hos. 6: 6–7; Isa. 29: 13; Mic. 6: 6–8.

¹¹⁹ Hos. 4: 1, 6; 6: 6; Isa. 28: 7–10; Mic. 3: 3–5, 11–12.

¹²⁰ Amos 2: 4, 12; Isa. 24: 5; 30: 12; Zeph. 3: 4.

¹²¹ Amos 2: 8; 4: 4–5; Isa. 2: 6; 8: 19; Zeph. 1: 4–6.

¹²² Hos. 13: 2; Mic. 6: 6. For a discussion on these verses and of the evidence for the practice of human sacrifice in ancient Israel, see Hess, *Israelite Religions*, 256–59, 326–27; Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 573–74, 578–79.

engage in “whoredom” (זנה)¹²³ through idolatry¹²⁴ and the worship of deities other than YHWH “their God.”¹²⁵

Second, they are charged with committing various social crimes against their fellow Israelites.¹²⁶ According to the deity, the nation is characterized by violence, murder, fraud, and robbery.¹²⁷ Unsurprisingly then, the vulnerable are said to be exploited and oppressed by the affluent elite, unscrupulous merchants, corrupt officials, judges who judge unjustly, and religious rulers who are spiritually bankrupt.¹²⁸

Third, the deity condemns Israel for entering into unauthorized foreign alliances with Egypt and Assyria in a delicate game of playing both ends against the middle.¹²⁹ In so doing, Israel has “rebelled” (מדִּי/פֶשַׁע)¹³⁰ against YHWH and harbours “arrogance” (גָּאֹן),¹³¹ supremely confident in their political finesse and increased militarism.¹³² Nevertheless, such self-security is an illusion, Egypt’s help is “worthless and empty” (הֶבֶל וָרִיק)¹³³ and Assyria cannot “cure you or heal your

¹²³ Note especially the frequent use of this term in Hos. 1–2, 4, 5–6, 9. For a recent discussion of this term along with the use of marriage and sexual metaphors in prophetic material, see S. Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹²⁴ Hos. 2: 8, 11–13; 3: 1; 4: 12; 8: 4–6; 10: 5, 6–8; 11: 2; 13: 2; Isa. 2: 8; Mic. 1: 5, 7; 5: 10–14; Hab. 2: 18.

¹²⁵ Hos. 2: 8, 13, 16–17; 9: 10; 11: 2; 13: 1; Zeph. 1: 4–6.

¹²⁶ For a detailed discussion on social criticism in the Hebrew prophets, see J. Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible: A Theological Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001) 213–75, 353–448.

¹²⁷ Hab. 1: 3–4; 2: 6–19; Hos. 4: 2; Isa. 5: 7–8, 19–23; Zeph. 1: 9.

¹²⁸ Amos 2: 6–7; 4: 1; 5: 7, 11–12; 8: 4–6; Hos. 4: 4–5; 12: 8; Isa. 3: 5, 12, 16; 5: 14; 10: 1–2; Mic. 2: 1–2, 8–9; 3: 1–12; 6: 11–12; Zeph. 3: 3.

¹²⁹ Hos. 5: 3–13; 7: 10–11; 8: 8–10; 12: 1; Isa. 30: 1–8; 31: 1–9. For a detailed study on the diplomatic context of ancient Israelite prophecy, see N. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth: Israelite Prophecy and International Relations in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

¹³⁰ Hos. 7: 13–14; 8: 1; Isa. 30: 9.

¹³¹ Hos. 5: 5; 7: 10; 12: 8.

¹³² Hos. 8: 14; 10: 10–15.

¹³³ Isa. 30: 7.

wound” (לִרְפֹּא לְכֶם וְלֹא־יִגָּהֶה מִכֶּם מְזֹר),¹³⁴ only YHWH can protect Israel from foreign encroachment and ensure its prosperity.¹³⁵

7.6.2 Pronouncement of Punishment.

As a result of these offenses, through oracles the deity announces that the accused will face divine judgment. This may take on a conventional guise, as it does in Amos (1: 2–2: 5), where it is promised that foreign and neighboring nations guilty of war crimes against the northern kingdom will incur a combination of punishments that may include being “devoured” (אָכַל) by fire, “shattered” (שָׁבַר), “cut-off” (הִכָּה), “assailed” (שׁוּב יָד; lit. “to turn one’s hand against”), “killed” (הָרַג), and “exiled” (גָּלָה)—all of which are inflicted by the divine hand. More often, however, oracles of judgment against the nations are not so formulaic, but represent the future devastation and/or eradication of Israel’s enemies through an extensive variety of terms and imagery that communicate divine opposition.¹³⁶

As for Israel, oracles frequently indicate that, far from being excluded, they too will surely be held to account for their offences. According to the deity, Israel will experience a spiritual “famine” (רָעָב) in which there is no “hearing the words of YHWH” (לִשְׁמֹעַ אֶת דְּבַר יְהוָה),¹³⁷ a “darkness” (חֹשֶׁךְ)¹³⁸ wherein he will not give

¹³⁴ Hos. 5: 13.

¹³⁵ Isa. 31: 1–9.

¹³⁶ For a detailed treatment of the oracles about foreign nations, see D. Christensen, *Prophecy and War in Ancient Israel: Studies in the Oracles against the Nations in Old Testament Prophecy* (Berkeley: BIBAL Press, 1989).

¹³⁷ Amos 8: 11. Paul (Amos, 265) understands the statement as an explicit reference to “the absence of prophecy, depriving man of the divine word.” Alternatively, Andersen and Freedman (Amos, 824–25) interpret the phrase, “words of YHWH”, to refer to the “written code given by Moses at Sinai,” though they acknowledge that there is inevitably some allusion to the delivery of divine words to people through prophets.

¹³⁸ Note also the motif of divine silence which apparently accompanies imagery of famine/darkness in Isa. 8: 20–22.

revelation to their prophets nor “answer” (ענה)¹³⁹ but instead he will “hide” (סתר),¹⁴⁰ “withdraw” (חליץ),¹⁴¹ and “depart” (שור)¹⁴² from them. The deity himself will “punish” (פקד)¹⁴³ Israel even as he punishes foreign nations,¹⁴⁴ for he also will violently oppose Israel¹⁴⁵ until they too are “delivered up” (סגר),¹⁴⁶ “eradicated” (שמד),¹⁴⁷ and “exiled” (גלה)¹⁴⁸ from their homeland and the king is “destroyed” (דמה).¹⁴⁹ Amazingly, foreign nations are often the very mechanism by which the deity admits he will do these things.¹⁵⁰

7.6.3 Admonishment.

Several oracles explicitly indicate that Israel’s suffering was ultimately intended by the deity to be redemptive and not merely retributive.¹⁵¹ Indeed, on a number of occasions, the deity admonishes the people of Israel to humbly repent¹⁵² and exercise heartfelt devotion,¹⁵³ to “hate evil, love good, and establish justice in

¹³⁹ Mic. 3: 4, 6–7. That is, the prophets will be deprived of attaining oracles by either means of “vision” (חזה) or “divination” (קסם). On this interpretation, see H. Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, Augsburg) 103–4. Alternatively, Waltke (*A Commentary on Micah*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007] 164) claims that these terms refer not so much to prophetic means as “subcategories of prophets” (i.e. they function as *nomen agentis*).

¹⁴⁰ Mic. 3: 4.

¹⁴¹ Hos. 5: 6.

¹⁴² Hos. 9: 12.

¹⁴³ Amos 3: 2, 14; Hos. 1: 4; 2: 15 (Eng. 2: 13); 4: 9, 14; 8: 13; 9: 9; 12: 2; Zeph. 1: 8, 9, 12; 3: 7. On the use of פקד (esp. with על) to indicate divine judgment, see DCH, פקד, 6: 740–41.

¹⁴⁴ “The king of Assyria” Isa. 10: 12; “the world” 13: 11; “Tyre” 23: 17;

¹⁴⁵ Amos 2: 13–16; 7: 9; 9: 1–4; Hos. 5: 12–14; 7: 12–13; 8: 14; 9: 15–16; 13: 7–16; Isa. 28: 1–4; Mic. 1: 6; 2: 3–5; 3: 12; Zeph. 1: 2–13.

¹⁴⁶ Amos 6: 8–10.

¹⁴⁷ Amos 9: 8; Hos. 10: 8; Mic. 5: 13.

¹⁴⁸ Amos 5: 3–5; 5: 27; 6: 7; Hos. 9: 3, 6; 10: 6; 11: 5; Isa. 5: 13; 6: 11–13; 8: 1–4; 39: 6–8; Mic. 1: 16; 4: 6–13; 6: 13–16. Note also Hos. 9: 17 “they will be wanderers among the nations” (וְיִהְיוּ נִדְדִים בְּגוֹיִם).

¹⁴⁹ Hos. 10: 7, 15.

¹⁵⁰ Amos 6: 14; Hab 1; Isa. 5: 26–30; 7: 17–18; 8: 5–10; 9: 11 (Eng. 9: 12); 10: 5; 22: 1–25; (poss. Joel 1: 2–18); Mic. 4: 11–12; Nah. 1: 12; 2: 8; 3: 7, 18.

¹⁵¹ Amos 4: 6–11; Hos. 3: 4–5; 7: 10; Isa. 9: 12 (Eng. 9: 13). On the retributive and reforming aim of disciplinary punishment in Amos, see Paul, *Amos*, 141–44.

¹⁵² Joel 1: 14; 2: 12–13, 15–17; Mic. 1: 6

¹⁵³ Mic. 6: 6–8; Hos. 6: 6.

the gate” (שְׁנֹאו־רָע וְאָהְבוּ טוֹב וְהִצִּיגוּ בַשַּׁעַר מִשְׁפָּט),¹⁵⁴ to “seek (the deity/good) and live” (חִיָּה; דְּרֹשׁ/בִּקֵּשׁ),¹⁵⁵ and to “(re)turn” (שׁוּב)¹⁵⁶ to him rather than continue on a self-destructive path.

7.6.4 Reassurance.

The divine message wasn’t always doom and gloom. Rather, a number of oracles also sought to communicate divine reassurances to their audiences in the face of a crisis. Indeed, besides the messages of peace and prosperity uttered by those prophets otherwise considered questionable to the writers of the Hebrew sources,¹⁵⁷ in Isaiah the deity repeatedly pledges to protect Judah and preserve its kings, Ahaz and Hezekiah, from imminent foreign threats.¹⁵⁸ Oracles, moreover, held out the promise of a limited sentence whereby the deity would eventually avenge the people’s cruel treatment,¹⁵⁹ reverse their punishment of exile,¹⁶⁰ restore their nation and fortunes,¹⁶¹ reestablish peace,¹⁶² and again reign over them as their benevolent and sovereign deity.¹⁶³

7.6.5 Commissioning.

A number of references indicate the deity’s role in commissioning prophets through oracles.¹⁶⁴ At its most basic, this may be intimated through the deity’s use of

¹⁵⁴ Amos 5: 15.

¹⁵⁵ Amos 5: 4, 6, 14; Hos. 10: 12; Zeph. 2: 3.

¹⁵⁶ Isa. 31: 6; Joel 2: 11–13.

¹⁵⁷ Mic. 3: 5.

¹⁵⁸ Isa. 7: 4–9, 11; 37: 6–7, 30–35.

¹⁵⁹ Joel 4: 2–21 (Eng. 3: 2–21); Zeph. 2: 7–11.

¹⁶⁰ Hos. 1: 7; 2: 1, 14–23; 3: 5; 11: 8–11; Isa. 10: 20–27; 14: 1–3; Mic. 2: 12; 4: 6–13; 7: 16–17; Nah. 1: 12–15.

¹⁶¹ Amos 9: 11–15; Hos. 14: 4–8; Isa. 4: 2–6; 9: 1–7; Joel 2: 18–4: 1 (Eng. 2: 18–3: 1); Nah. 2: 2; Zeph. 3: 9–20.

¹⁶² Isa. 2: 2–4; 30: 18–26; 32: 1–20.

¹⁶³ Isa. 11: 1–12: 6; 28: 5–6; 32: 1–2; Mic. 4: 7; 5: 2–7.

¹⁶⁴ These references are familiar to form critics as “call/commission narratives” (*Berufungsbericht*) and are argued by them to exemplify various historical and/or literary functions. For a recent survey of this discussion, see D. Phinney, “Call/Commission Narratives,” *DOTP* 65–71.

the couplets “go and say”¹⁶⁵ or “go and perform (an act)”¹⁶⁶ to introduce his commands and instructions to the prophet. Perhaps more revealing are two examples which occur in Amos’ defense of his prophetic activity. In Amos 3: 8, the prophet rhetorically asks that since “YHWH has spoken, who can but prophesy?” (יְהוָה דִּבֶּר מִי לֹא יִנָּבֵא). Later in 7: 14–15, against Amaziah’s dismissives, Amos retorts that his activity is not so much a matter of his own vocational ambitions as it is in response to YHWH telling him to “Go, prophesy to my people Israel” (לֵךְ הִנָּבֵא אֶל-עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל). In both references, the prophet admits that the impetus for his prophetic activity ultimately lies in the divine charge from YHWH and not in himself.

7.6.6 Summary.

In this section we have attempted to provide an overview of the content of prophetic oracles in our Hebrew sources. It would be no exaggeration to say that a significant amount—if not the majority—of divine speeches are concerned with outlining the guilt and future punishment of various nations, in particular, Israel. Unlike most of its foreign counterparts, however, through oracles Israel is forewarned, thus leaving open the possibility that their suffering may be averted. Moreover, Israel is also reassured of divine protection and restoration. Finally, there is oracular evidence which indicates that the prophets themselves were commissioned by the deity.

7.7 Responses to Hebrew Prophecy.

Hebrew prophecy appears to have evoked an array of different responses from its audiences. In accordance with the written sources, which often cast these in

¹⁶⁵ Isa. 6: 9–10; 7: 3–4; 22: 15; 38: 5 (note also Jon. 1: 2; 3: 2). This command is sometimes shortened to just “say” (G Impv. (אמר): Isa. 3: 10; 35: 4; Hos. 2: 3.

¹⁶⁶ Isa. 20: 2; Hos. 1: 2; 3: 1.

relation to the canonical prophetic message, a survey of the various responses to prophecy may be roughly organized under the following headings: Compliance, Non-compliance, Positive Evaluation, Appeal, Payment, Denunciation, Prohibition.

7.7.1 Compliance.

At its most basic, a compliant response follows a simple two-part pattern in which “the deity said ‘do x, y, and z’” is followed by “and the audience did x, y, and z”. Among the sources, only the prophets Isaiah and Hosea are recorded to have acted in such strict accordance with the prophetic message, closely adhering to divine commands no matter how disagreeable or publicly shameful the circumstances.¹⁶⁷

A notable contrast occurs outside of our corpus with the prophet Jonah, who, despite his initial non-compliance,¹⁶⁸ eventually does acquiesce with most of the oracle of YHWH that had “come to him a second time.”¹⁶⁹

7.7.2 Confirmation.

On several occasions the deity proffers “signs” (אֵימֹת) to the addressees of his oracles in order to guarantee the reliability of a previous divine message.¹⁷⁰

According to Isa. 7: 11, such verificatory signs could, in the presence of a prophet, be requested from the deity by the recipients of his oracles. Indeed, Isa. 38: 22 records one such example.¹⁷¹ However, there is no indication that the process for requesting

¹⁶⁷ Isa. 20: 2; Hos. 1: 2–3, 3: 1–3.

¹⁶⁸ In response to YHWH’s call to “arise” (קום), “go to Nineveh” (לֵךְ אֶל-נִינְוָה), and “cry out against it” (קְרֵא עָלֶיהָ), Jonah usurps the simple two-part pattern of compliance and only “arises” in order that he may “flee to Tarshish” (לְבָרֵחַ תַּרְשִׁישָׁה), and, ultimately, “from the presence of YHWH” (מִלְפָּנֵי יְהוָה).

¹⁶⁹ Jon. 3: 1–3. While the text makes explicit that Jonah “arose” (קום) and “went” (הלך) to Nineveh—as per YHWH’s instructions (בְּדִבְרֵי יְהוָה)—it leaves conspicuously unconfirmed to what extent the message he delivered reflects “the message which I tell you” (הַקְרִיאתָ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי דֹבֵר אֵלֶיךָ).

¹⁷⁰ Isa. 7: 14; 8: 18; 37: 30; 38: 7–8. For a discussion of the practice of confirmation throughout the Hebrew Bible, see Jonhson, *Cultic Prophet*, 52–54.

¹⁷¹ Although not strictly part of our corpus, as is also the case with this verse, Isa 39:8 is noteworthy for its portrayal of king Hezekiah’s unique response to the preceding oracle of Isaiah wherein he

the confirmation of an oracle by signs was in any way associated with technical divinatory procedures, although the character of the signs given may involve purportedly miraculous events.¹⁷²

7.7.3 Non-compliance.

As previously discussed in section 7.6.1, the audience's failure to comply with divine instruction and the accusation that they are "unwilling" (לא אבה) or "do not obey" (לא שמע; lit. "hear") are recurring themes within prophetic messages.¹⁷³

Audience non-compliance also occurs in the prophetic narrative of Isa. 7, which records the negative response of Ahaz to Isaiah's delivery of an oracle of salvation.¹⁷⁴

Here, YHWH speaks through the prophet and invites the king to "ask a sign for yourself" (שאל-לך אות) that Ahaz may fulfill his obligation to "believe" (אמן) and gain tangible evidence of the deity's intent. Ahaz declines the divine invitation, however, saying "I will not ask" (לא אשאל) and proceeds to couch his rejection in pseudo-piety.¹⁷⁵

7.7.4 Payment.

Several oracles allude to the practice of remunerating personnel for their prophetic activity. Andersen and Freedman tentatively interpret the oracle in Mic 2: 11 to indicate that prophets could demand "wine" (יין) and "strong drink" (שכור)

states that "the word of YHWH that you have spoken is good" (טוב דבר-יהוה אשר דברת). Attestations of similar phraseology elsewhere indicate that this comment should not be understood as *terminus technicus* limited only to prophecy (see Deut. 1: 14; 1 Sam. 9: 10; 2 Sam. 15: 3; 1 Kgs. 2: 38; 18: 24; 22: 13; Prov. 15: 23). Rather, the basis for the king's laconic affirmation lies in the subsequent statement: "for he thought, 'There will be peace and security in my days'" (ויאמר כי יהיה שלום ואמת בימי), apparently reflecting his short-sighted self-interest. In any case, the king's words uniquely confirm Isaiah's mediatory role as God's messenger.

¹⁷² E.g. Isa. 38: 7–8.

¹⁷³ Hos. 9: 17; Isa. 28: 12, 30: 9; Mic. 5: 15; Zeph. 3: 2.

¹⁷⁴ A unique

¹⁷⁵ Isa. 7: 1–12.

in response to their prophetic utterances.¹⁷⁶ In Mic. 3: 11 a reference to prophets who “divine for silver” (בְּכֶסֶף יִקְסְמוּ) appears alongside the kingdom’s “leaders” (רָאשׁ) who “judge for bribes” (בְּשֹׁחַד יִשְׁפֹּטוּ) and “priests” (כֹּהֵן) who “teach for a price” (בְּמַחֲרֵי יוֹרוּ).¹⁷⁷ Whether the mention of “silver” in this instance should be understood to mean that, in response to their services, the Hebrew prophets could actually expect a monetary reward is not altogether certain, though, indeed, it is not without precedent.¹⁷⁸ Alternatively, according to Mic 3: 5, prophets would “proclaim peace” (וְקִרְאוּ שָׁלוֹם) so long as they were fed (lit. “bite with their teeth” (הַנֹּשְׂכִים בְּשִׁנֵּיהֶם)), which may be taken to mean that payment could be made in kind.¹⁷⁹ The parallel antithetical statement which follows, however, suggests that the prophets’ expectations were not limited to rewards of food only but encompassed anything they may demand.¹⁸⁰ This broader concept, wherein the language of eating can represent an individual’s “livelihood,” is probably the idea behind Amaziah’s exhortation to Amos to prophesy back in Judah in order that he may “eat bread there” (וְאָכַל-לֶחֶם) in Amos 7: 12. Presuming that Amos was in Bethel with an intention to “prophesy for profit,”¹⁸¹ Amaziah the priest suggests that the prophet could “support himself” better by plying his trade south of the border, among those more sympathetic to his anti-northern prophetic message.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁶ Andersen and Freedman, *Micah*, 329–30. Cf. Waltke (*Micah*, 124) who interprets the ל preposition preceding “wine and strong drink” to function as a definite article “marking them out to a class unique and determined in themselves.”

¹⁷⁷ Mic. 3: 11. Andersen and Freedman note that, while in principle there is “nothing wrong with accepting remuneration for such services,” in parallel with bribery, these payments have clearly lost their “innocent meaning in legitimate trade” (idem, *Micah*, 384).

¹⁷⁸ 1 Sam 9: 6–10.

¹⁷⁹ R. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC 32; Dallas: Word Books, 1984) 34.

¹⁸⁰ According to Wolff (*Micah*, 102–3), פה in this instance denotes an oral function, such as “speech,” “command,” “wish,” and, the original meaning of the phrase indicated that “prophets not only accept bribes, but that they also utter particular wishes or even make demands.”

¹⁸¹ Paul, *Amos*, 242; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 375.

¹⁸² Wolff, *Amos*, 311–13; J. Curtis, “A Folk Etymology of nābī,” VT 29 (1979) 492.

7.7.5 Denunciation.

In addition to directly confronting the prophet, Amaziah also responds to the oracles of Amos by denouncing him. According to Amos 7: 10-11, Amaziah “sends” (שלח) to Jeroboam a tripartite report. In it he accuses Amos of “conspiring” (קשר) against the king,¹⁸³ warns against the national threat imminently posed by the prophet’s seditious speech,¹⁸⁴ and “cites in summary fashion two aspects of Amos’ preaching bound to get Jeroboam’s attention: the death of the king himself in war and the exile of the nation.”¹⁸⁵ Whilst the priest’s decision to inform the king of the prophet’s activity is unique among our sources, it is noteworthy that the activities of prophets are also reported by officials in several of the Lachish Ostraca,¹⁸⁶ let alone the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Taken together, it seems that officials were probably more often in the habit of relaying to their superiors information on the prophets and the contents of their messages than our limited selection of sources otherwise indicate.

7.7.6 Prohibition.

Having already confronted and denounced the prophet,¹⁸⁷ according to Amos 7: 13, Amaziah’s final response is to instruct Amos “never again to prophesy” (לֹא-תִסֵּיף עוֹד לְהַנְבִּיאַ) at Bethel. However, Amaziah had more in mind than merely

¹⁸³ Andersen and Freedman note that the term קשר suggests the organizing of a group “for the purposes of insurrection and revolution or treachery against a sovereign or against God” (idem, *Amos*, 766).

¹⁸⁴ לֹא-תִכַּל הָאָרֶץ לְהִכָּל אֶת-כָּל-דִּבְרָיו (lit. “the land cannot endure all his words”).

¹⁸⁵ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 375.

¹⁸⁶ Lachish Ostraca 3, 16, and, possibly, 6 (See J. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions: Vol.1, Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions* [London: Oxford University Press, 1971] 45–46; cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, 322–24). For a discussion of these texts, what they reveal about official attitudes to preexilic Hebrew prophecy, and the context they provide for understanding Amos 7: 10–11, see Parker, “Official Attitudes,” 50–68; “The Lachish Letters and Official Reactions to Prophecies,” in *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Richardson*, ed. L. Hopfe (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994) 65–78; J. Couey, “Amos vii 10–17 and Royal Attitudes Toward Prophecy in the Ancient Near East,” *VT* 58 (2008) 300–14.

¹⁸⁷ See above Sections 7.7.5–6.

restricting Amos from the “state temple” (בֵּית מִמְלָכָה) over which he presided, Amaziah’s intent was to prohibit the prophet’s activity kingdom-wide. As much is clear from his censure of the prophet in the previous verse and evidently Amos himself understood this as well. Several verses later, Amos replies citing the words of the priest, “You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel!’ and ‘Do not preach against the house of Isaac!’” (אַתָּה אָמַר לֹא תִנָּבֵא עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא תִטִּיף עַל־בֵּית יִשְׁחָק). Amos continues to prophesy, of course, while all Amaziah’s prohibition achieves is to unwittingly confirm the divine accusation against Israel, recorded earlier in 2: 12, where unnamed people had “commanded the prophets, saying, “Do not prophesy!”” (וְעַל־הַנְּבִיאִים צִוִּיתָם לֵאמֹר לֹא תִנָּבְאוּ).

Amos is not the only prophet to encounter such a response, those offended by the oracles of Micah apparently uttered similar prohibitions. According to Mic. 2: 6, unspecified persons commanded Micah “Do not preach!” (אַל־תִּטְפֹּן),¹⁸⁸ doing so because they themselves apparently “preached” (נִטְף) a different message¹⁸⁹ and sought to censor Micah’s opposition. The prophet Isaiah also notes the opposition of people whom he identifies as “rebellious” (מֵרֶה), “lying” (כַּחֲשׁ), and “unwilling to hear the instruction of YHWH” (לֹא־אָבוּ שְׁמוּעַ תּוֹרַת יְהוָה). According to Isaiah, they prohibit the activity of “seers” (רֹאֵה) and “prophets” (חִזִּיה) commanding “Do not see” (לֹא תִרְאוּ) and “Do not prophesy what is right” (לֹא תִחְזִיזוּ־לָנוּ נְכוֹחֹת), demanding that prophetic personnel should “speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions” (דִּבְרוּ־לָנוּ חִלְקוֹת חֲזוֹן מְהֻלָּלוֹת) instead.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ On the verb נִטְף, see above section 7.5.1.

¹⁸⁹ Micah claims לֹא־יִטְפֹּן לְאַלֶּה (lit. “They will not preach these”), referring specifically to his oracles of doom recorded in Mic. 2: 3–6. For a discussion of the phrase and its antecedent, see Waltke, *Micah*, 112–13; Andersen and Freedman, *Micah*, 303–7.

¹⁹⁰ Isa. 30: 9–10.

7.7.7 Summary.

In this section it has been shown that the Hebrew sources demonstrate that there existed a variety of responses to oracles and prophet activity. Indeed, there could be no certainty that audiences—including the prophets themselves—would comply with the content of prophetic messages, regardless of their purported divine origins. In contrast, audiences could appeal to the deity, refuse to comply, or oppose a prophet either, directly, through confrontation and prohibiting their activity, or indirectly by denouncing them to the king. There is also evidence that prophets could be paid for their services, a practice that apparently led to widespread abuse, though there is no evidence that such benefits were extended to any of the canonical prophets in our sources.

This completes our analysis of prophecy in the Hebrew sources wherein it appears that, on a general level at least, the phenomenon significantly overlaps with its Mesopotamian counterparts. Like them, prophecy in the Hebrew sources could also be prompted and its intermediaries also carried titles commensurate to their activity. Prophets in the Hebrew sources similarly were active within or without temples and, much like Mesopotamian prophets, could communicate oracles by speaking aloud or through symbolic actions. However, clear differences are observable between the respective corpora and, presently, we turn to synthesize the results of our analyses in the following chapter.

8. Synthesis.

This chapter is where our commitment to a consistent application of the same seven categories across each of the three corpora begins to yield fruit. Having completed our analyses on the Mari, Neo-Assyrian, and Hebrew corpora, we now come to a point where we can begin to synthesize our observations of the phenomenon of prophecy in each. Following Hallo's enjoiner to pay as "equal attention to possible contrasts" as to potential similarities,¹ this chapter endeavours to highlight both overlap and divergence, not simply between the biblical phenomena and its Mesopotamian counterparts, but also between prophecy in the Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources.

8.1 Prompting Prophecy.

8.1.1 In Response to Sacrifice.

Notwithstanding the cultic concerns that are occasionally mentioned within Neo-Assyrian and Hebrew oracles, only at Mari is prophetic activity attested as occurring alongside cultic sacrifices. In the Mari sources, several oracles are issued in response to sacrifices which are substantially large, sponsored by the crown, and are offered "for the king's life" (ARM 26 209). Neo-Assyrian and Hebrew sources, in contrast, demonstrate no such association. Indeed, whilst prophets encourage sacrifices in the former (like their Mariote counterparts), and, whilst sacrifices are

¹ Hallo, "Compare and Contrast," 2.

generally denounced as relatively unimportant in the latter, nevertheless, neither source records that divine utterances occur as a coordinated response to sacrifices.²

This absence seems surprising, especially given the supposed cultic location of Neo-Assyrian and Hebrew prophecy.³ A possible explanation could be, as Stökl has recently argued,⁴ that the situation reflects a differentiation between prophecy which is “cultic” (i.e. performed as part of cultic ritual) from that which is merely connected with the temple. Thus, the absence of a connection between sacrifice and prophecy in both the Neo-Assyrian and Hebrew sources may suggest that the phenomena there differ from prophecy at Mari in that the latter was cultic prophecy while the former was not. However, such an explanation remains speculative at best, not least but because there is no unambiguous evidence of any such division in either the Neo-Assyrian or Old-Babylonian periods, and, yet, there is evidence that the various prophetic personnel were largely synonymous in all else but physical appearance.⁵

8.1.2 In Response to Prayer.

According to the Neo-Assyrian sources, royal personnel and, especially, the king, had immediate access to the deities and could prompt oracles by petitioning them directly, without recourse to an intermediary. Besides this, only the account of the sick king Hezekiah’s tearful prayer to YHWH and the subsequent prophetic response in Isa. 38:3–8 seems to corroborate it.

² Malamat claims that Num. 23: 29–30 and 1 Kgs. 18: 22–40 provide explicit parallels with the Mari material on this matter (idem, *Mari and the Bible*, 69 n. 27, 91 n. 23). However, Hilber (*Cultic Prophecy*, 26) disputes these. Because they occur outside the scope of this study they will not be addressed here.

³ Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy*, 218–26.

⁴ Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 50–63.

⁵ See the discussion in 3.2.2 and 5.2.2.

Yet, the image that royal personages could, unmediated, prompt an immediate prophetic response by their entreaties is a highly misleading one. As for the Isaianic account, not only does it occur outside of our corpus, so that it cannot be considered a legitimate comparator for the purposes of this study, but more importantly, one can be sure that the narration of Hezekiah's entreaty nevertheless reflects a degree of literary economy by dint of the prophet's bedside visit in the previous verse. As for the supposed unmediated entreaties in the Neo-Assyrian sources, it should be noted that most occur within the royal inscriptions—highly crafted literary works that only rarely acknowledge divinatory personnel, usually omitting them altogether.⁶ Moreover, where attested in a couple of oracles, it is entirely consistent with the intimacy of the oracular context that no mention is made of the petitioner's agent but only the fragile emotional state of the petitioner.

Rather than the royals themselves being capable of prompting oracles, it seems much more likely that prophets were involved in mediating their prayers to the deities, while the king himself remained a step removed. At Mari, ARM 26 199 recounts that Zimri-Lim had "entrusted" (D *wârum*) Lupaḥum with a petitionary message that the prophet "transmitted" (*babālum*) to Dagan for the king. Similarly, in Isa. 37:2–4 Hezekiah dispatches a delegation to Isaiah with a panicked message, calling on the prophet to pray to YHWH on his behalf. Indeed, the image of prophets in immediate communication with the deity—calling out, petitioning, and receiving divine responses—is ubiquitous in the Hebrew sources and here overlaps with the Mari sources almost completely. In all, only a questionable lack of evidence in the Neo-Assyrian sources—perhaps the result of ideological or literary conventions—prevents us from concluding that prophets mediated royal petitions across all three corpora.

⁶ See section 5.5.4; Atkinson, "Prophecy in K1285?" 78–82, n. 110.

8.1.3 In Response to Inquiry.

Only at Mari is there any clear evidence of oracles having been prompted by “inquiries” (*šâlum*) made through prophetic channels, though, even there, some uncertainty remains over the precise nature of the means employed. Two reports from Šibtu (ARM 26 207, 212) describe divine utterances arising as a result of her inquiring of male and female prophetic intermediaries to whom she “gave signs to drink” (*ittâtîm šaqûm*), the latter an apparent reference to a particular technical innovation introduced by the queen.⁷ In the Hebrew sources, the cognate *דרש* and its synonym *שאל* are only implicitly associated with inquiries made through prophetic means. In oracles the deity condemns the peoples’ practice of consulting foreign deities through non-prophetic divinatory practices and lambasts that, despite the peoples’ unwillingness, he has always been available for their (presumably prophetic) inquiries. Finally, as it was demonstrated earlier, there is no unambiguous evidence of inquiries made through prophetic means among the Neo-Assyrian sources.

8.1.4 Summary.

In each of the three corpora, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that there was little doubt that divine utterances could be prompted. Among the various means identified, only petitionary prayer is common to all. The entreaties of the king and the royal household were evidently mediated to the deity by prophetic personnel since it was they who possessed immediate access to the deity and could transmit the divine response. By contrast, the giving of oracles in response to sacrifices appears peculiar to Mari, as does the conducting of prophetic inquiries accompanied by technical means.

⁷ Sasson, “Posting of Letters,” 307–08.

8.2 Prophets.

8.2.1 Terminology.

Among the personnel who utter divine messages, several examples of overlapping terminology occur between the different corpora and invite comparison. The titles *muhḥû(m)* and *maḥḥû* are attested at Mari and in the Neo-Assyrian sources, respectively. In lexical texts from each period,⁸ *muhḥû(m)* and *maḥḥû* are both logographically represented by LÚ(MÍ).GUB.BA⁹ and a general consensus considers them to be identical,¹⁰ reflecting Babylonian and Assyrian phonological variants of nominal forms based upon the verb *maḥû(m)*. Functionally, moreover, both terms are attested speaking divine messages, participating in cult rituals associated with Ištar,¹¹ and are connected to temples. At least with regard to their respective prophetic roles, all of this points to a high degree of continuity between the *muhḥû(m)* at Mari and the *maḥḥû* in the Neo-Assyrian period.

A second overlap appears to occur between the attestation of *nabû* at Mari and the נָבִיא in the Hebrew sources. Most consider these terms to be cognates. Indeed, even Fleming and Huehnergard¹²—scholars who represent two opposing sides of the etymological argument¹³—both claim that LÚ.na-bi-i^{MEŠ} at Mari and Hebrew נָבִיא are closely connected, holding that conclusions drawn about one are immediately

⁸ MSL 12.4.212: 213; 4.222: 117; 5.22: 23–24; 5.32: 26–27;

⁹ In addition to the following note, see also the occurrences of *maḥḥû* and *muhḥû* side-by-side in the Ugarit recension of Diri I (MSL 15.2.1.2: 171–72).

¹⁰ CAD M/1 90–91, sub *maḥḥû*; AHW, *maḥḥû(m)*, 582; GAG³ §55 O. Cf. Wohl, “Problem of the *maḥḥû*,” 112–18.

¹¹ FM 3 2: ii 22', s. 3; 3 3: iii 2', 6', 8'; SAA 3 34: 28 = 3 35: 31; Ritual of Ištar and Dumuzi A IIa: 37.

¹² Fleming, “Etymological Origins,” 217–24; “Syrian Religious Personnel,” 175–83; Huehnergard, “Etymology and Meaning,” 88*–93*.

¹³ According to Fleming, a link between *munabbiātu* and LÚ.MEŠ.na-bi-i at Emar suggests that the LÚ.na-bi-i^{MEŠ} at Mari as well as the Hebrew נָבִיא both have active voice and denote “those who invoke (deities).” Huehnergard, however, denies the link and suggests that, rather than turning to Emar, the LÚ.na-bi-i^{MEŠ} at Mari should be interpreted in light of the Hebrew נָבִיא, a less ambiguous *qatīl* pattern, as a passive substantive participle which denotes: “those who are called (by the deity).”

relevant to the other. Admittedly, however, our analysis has shown that the relationship of the *nabû* to mantic activity is far from certain, their role obscured by the only attestation of *nabû* at Mari occurring in a broken context. In contrast, the function of *בִּיאָה* is quite clear in our Hebrew sources. There, the *נְבִיאִים* are among the ruling elite, functioning as ecclesiastical leaders, and whose task it was to “watch” and “guard” the people of Israel on their deity’s behalf by transmitting the divine messages revealed to them.

8.2.2 Gender of Prophets.

All three corpora attest both male and female prophets, though they each do so disproportionately. At Mari, the number of male prophets is almost double that of their feminine counterparts. Conversely, in the Neo-Assyrian sources female prophets are attested more than twice as often as male ones. Finally, the prophetic personnel in our Hebrew sources are almost always male, with only one reference to an unspecified *נְבִיאָה*.

In this study, explanations for apparent gender disparities have focused on the character of the corpora and the biases they contain. At Mari, there is a close correlation between the prophet’s gender and the gender of the correspondent in whose letter they are attested. Consequently, the overall predominance of male prophets is the result of there being a disproportionately high number of male correspondents, whereas the reverse is true when the correspondence was forwarded by a female sender. In the Neo-Assyrian corpus, the inordinate amount of female prophets is most likely due to the overrepresentation of women in the oracle collections, by far the largest information source on the prophets in that period.

8.2.3 Individuals and Groups.

Although prophets are typically presented as active individuals, all three corpora attest the existence of prophetic groups. In particular, the Mari and

Neo-Assyrian sources attest groups of prophets participating in cult rituals.

Prophetic groups in our Hebrew sources, by contrast, contain no explicit reference to their cultic context. However, the presence of individual prophets in temples as well as their occasional association with priestly groups and other spiritual leaders certainly caution against concluding that Hebrew prophetic groups did not participate in cult rituals.

8.2.4 Messenger Status.

Common to the Mesopotamian sources is the recognition by their contemporaries that prophets possessed the status of messengers. At Mari, prophets are identified as the “*šukkalum* (“messenger”) of the deity (Dagan)” and, together with several non-prophetic personnel, they are referred to as “people who are messengers,” receiving recompense commensurate with that of a messenger. In the Neo-Assyrian sources, prophets are referred to as *mupassiru* (“deliverer of news”), while their oracles—the *šipir mahḥê*—are analogous to divine “messages” (*šipir, našpartu*).

Although not stated as explicitly as in the Mesopotamian sources, something akin to this seems also to be articulated in our Hebrew sources. There, prophets are divinely commissioned to “go and speak” prophetic oracles, ostensibly functioning as messengers on behalf of the deity. Along the same lines, at Mari, the prophets frequently claim that they were “sent” (*šapārum*) by the deity to speak their divine messages.

8.2.5 Summary.

With regards to the prophets themselves, there appears to be a great deal of overlap between the Mesopotamian sources. Not only do the Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources share almost identical terminology in their respective attestations of *muhḥû(m)/mahḥû*, more importantly, the roles of these prophets compare closely as

well. Alternatively, whilst there is little doubt that the *nabû* at Mari and נְבִיא in the Hebrew sources overlap terminologically, due to the uncertain role of *nabû* in its only attestation at Mari, it remains unclear if these terms function in a similar way. Only the Mari and Neo-Assyrian prophets, moreover, are explicitly recognized by their contemporaries to possess messenger status or are attested in groups who participate in cult rituals, whereas the Hebrew sources provide little direct insight into either. All three corpora attest both male and female prophets, although the inordinate amount of one or the other genders is likely the result of a source bias in their respective corpus and should not be taken as indicative that prophecy was “feminized” or the like.

8.3 Prophetic Deities.

Common to all three sources is the dubious image that a certain god (or goddess) could be more closely associated with prophecy than any another deity. At Mari, divine utterances are far more frequently attested with Dagan than with any other deity. In the Neo-Assyrian sources it is Ištar, while in the Hebrew sources only the oracles of YHWH are recorded. However, these observations are somewhat misleading. The relative frequency with which Dagan and Ištar are attested among their respective sources evidently is an unintended result of Mari and Neo-Assyrian deities being closely associated with specific locales and the disproportionate amounts of material that were sent from those places. In the Hebrew sources, the image of YHWH’s prophetic hegemony is mitigated by occasional references to other deities and alternative divinatory techniques, some of which could also evoke an audible response or “voice” if consulted.

One consequence of the correlation between deities and places in the Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources is that their gods and goddesses appear to have been prophetically active largely within their own locales or cult centres. The Hebrew

sources, by contrast, present YHWH as anything else but a parochial deity, he could speak divine messages outside of his usual geographical base, being prophetically active further afield in neighboring lands (e.g. through Amos of Judah who was active in Samaria and Bethel) and even foreign countries (e.g. Jonah of Israel in Nineveh).

8.4 Location of Prophecy.

8.4.1 Geographic Distribution.

An uncanny overlap can be observed between the Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources with regards to the geographic distribution of prophecy. At Mari, oracles were reported from as far west as the kingdom of Ḫalab, while in neighboring Unqi the Neo-Assyrians evidently were keen to be kept informed of any who opposed their rule, including prophets. Both corpora also denote the presence of prophets or prophetic activity to the south, in Babylonia, as well as to the east, among their peripheral neighbors. For the most part, however, the bulk of the Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources concentrate upon their respective heartlands, attesting to prophetic activity not only in their political centers, but also within their provincial capitals and satellite locales. In all, the Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources portray prophecy as a familiar phenomenon practiced across the fertile crescent.

The Hebrew sources, by contrast, record only the oracles of YHWH and make no reference to non-Israelite prophetic practices. Consequently, prophecy in the Hebrew sources is almost exclusively limited to recounting the activities of Hebrew prophets within the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel.

To this extent, the account of Jonah appears especially unusual. Not only does it contrast with our corpus of Hebrew sources,¹⁴ but, in recounting the activity of a

¹⁴ Although outside of our sources, the account of the prophet Elisha's journey to Damascus in 2 Kgs 8: 7–15 to anoint Hazael king over Aram coincides with this scenario.

prophet outside of his homeland in a foreign capital, it also differs significantly from the prophets of the Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources, none of whom traverse across international boundaries, despite their broad purview. In these sources, prophets are recorded as travelling only between neighboring or provincial locales to deliver oracles or participate in the cultic rituals of familiar deities. To this extent, they coincide with the scenario in the Hebrew sources of the prophet Amos, a prophet from the Judean satellite of Tekoa who was active in the northern cities of Bethel and Samaria. Nevertheless, Jonah's prophetic activity in Nineveh is not altogether anomalous. Despite the prophet's foreign location, the account still maintains the exclusive role of the deity YHWH in Hebrew prophecy. Moreover, there are clear indications that Mari and Assyria were both keen to be kept informed of the oracles emanating from foreign deities and the activities of foreign prophets.

8.4.2 Temple Venues.

The image of the temple as a venue associated with prophets and prophetic activity occurs in all three corpora, but is particularly prominent within the Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources. At Mari, the temple seems to have been the expected venue for where one could hear divine messages spoken aloud, and, in the Neo-Assyrian sources, prophets are commonly associated with temples and appear on their payroll. Moreover, in contrast to Toorn's attempt to drive a wedge between them,¹⁵ both corpora explicitly attest to the delivery of oracles in temple contexts, the participation of prophets in temple-based cultic rituals, the expression of cultic concerns in oracles, the reporting of prophetic activity by temple personnel, temple functionaries who prophesy, and the close lexical association of prophetic personnel with known temple-based cult functionaries.

¹⁵ Van der Toorn, "Mesopotamian Prophecy," 80–84.

Unlike the Mesopotamian corpora, prophetic venues are only very rarely indicated in the Hebrew sources. Nevertheless, the temple context is mentioned on at least one occasion, albeit only incidentally. In Amos, the priest Amaziah states that the prophet had been quite active at the Bethel temple but was now no longer welcome there on account of his incendiary oracles and anti-northern sentiments.

8.4.3 Non-Temple Venues.

Besides the temple, the three corpora also overlap with respect to the occurrence of prophetic activity at public and royal venues. City gateways were a prominent public location and, in a letter sent to Mari (ARM 26 206), the prophet had prophesied there before an “assembly of the elders.” Among the Neo-Assyrian sources, a receipt (ZT 13463) records the payment of recompense to a prophet also located at the city gate. Reference to prophecy before a public assembly, like the one just referred to at Mari, is also attested in a Neo-Assyrian report (SAA 10 352), whereas collective audiences are mentioned in a couple of oracles (SAA 9 2.4, 3.2) and may be imagined in the outdoor scene which occurred at Labbanat (SAA 10 24). In the Hebrew sources, Isaiah, like the Assyrian Rab Shakeh, delivers divine words of YHWH at the “end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer’s field”—an otherwise busy public venue that was also within earshot of all who were nearby upon the city wall.

Prophets in the Hebrew sources appear to have gained the most intimate access to the king. In Isaiah 38–39, it is the prophet himself who takes the initiative (under divine instruction) and delivers oracles to Hezekiah within the royal palace in-person, even visiting the king within his bedchamber on one occasion. Alternatively, in the Neo-Assyrian sources it is the king who summoned an audience with the prophets (and prophetesses) at the royal court. Finally, reports of prophetic activity outside the palace gates of Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 208), Hammurabi

(ARM 26 371: 9), and Išme-Dagan (ARM 26 371: 18) indicate that prophets in the Mari sources had only limited access to the royal addressees of their oracles.

8.4.4 Summary.

In contrast to the wide geographic distribution of prophecy in the Mesopotamian sources, the Hebrew sources make no reference to non-Israelite prophetic practices and limit themselves to the activity of prophets within the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel.¹⁶ The temple as a venue for prophecy is common to all three corpora, as is also the evidence that prophetic activity could also occur outside temples in public or royal venues.

8.5 Prophetic Means of Delivering Oracles.

PROPHET TO AUDIENCE.

8.5.1 Spoken Transmission.

There can be little doubt to the view that oracles were audibly transmitted from prophets to their immediate audiences by verbal means. Indeed, several Mari and Neo-Assyrian authors themselves claim to have “heard” prophets “speak” purportedly divine messages. Moreover, our Hebrew sources, which are largely written from the viewpoint of the prophets, frequently record them summoning their audiences to “listen carefully,” “give ear,” and “to hear” what they have to say.

All three corpora attest to the oral delivery of oracles, embedding divine speech within quotations of prophets and employing terms which denote both general spoken communication as well as having a more modal nuance. Among the latter, it is interesting to note that verbs, etymologically related to various prophetic titles, occur in each of the corpora associated with the behaviour of

¹⁶ Some explanation for this omission is suggested by the unusual account of Jonah, which, although being the exception that proves the rule, still upholds the exclusive role of YHWH despite the foreign context of the prophet’s international mission.

prophets. Neo-Assyrian attestations of *ragāmu*, like רגם in our Hebrew sources, denote specific modes of spoken communication, whereas at Mari *maḥûm* (N stem) should probably be understood as an intensely hysterical state.¹⁷

8.5.2 Symbolic Actions.

It seems that actions speak louder than words for the prophets at Mari much the same as they do for Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah in our Hebrew sources. Both corpora attest episodes in which prophets, alongside verbal transmission, also engage in performative acts to symbolically communicate divine messages. With the exception of the specific actions themselves, the only observable difference between their respective portrayals lies in the fact that, in the Hebrew examples, such acts reportedly arise as the result of divine command, while at Mari their background is left unexplained.

The Neo-Assyrian sources, on the other hand, only attest actions which either coordinate with (i.e. *alāku*, *ṭarādu*) or nuance (i.e. *sarḥat*) the prophet's mode of speaking—two functions evident in the other corpora as well—but actually have little to do with the process of communicating oracles.

8.5.3 Committing Oracles to Writing.

The Mari and Hebrew sources overlap further, in that, both indicate how prophets not only communicated divine messages verbally and through symbolic actions, but they could also seek to have them committed to writing, preferring to transmit oracles to their addressees in textual form. Nevertheless, the phenomena do differ in several important ways. At Mari, oracles apparently were written down at the behest of the prophet, were strictly for the eyes of the addressee (Zimri-Lim) only, and were not meant for anything else other than his immediate attention and

¹⁷ Contra Nissinen who claims that *maḥû* tends to “introduce direct divine speech” (idem, “Socioreligious Role,” 93).

response. According to our Hebrew sources, by contrast, oracles were written down in response to divine commands and were aimed at a broad public audience as much for posterity as for the present.

DEITY TO PROPHET.

Whilst the association between divine revelation and the prophet's mental state is an interesting question, it seems more of a scholarly distraction than anything else. Indeed, there is little indication in any of the corpora to indicate that prophets were anything other than fully conscious during prophecy.¹⁸ This includes attestations of the verb *maḥûm*, which, because of its association with prophetic personnel at Mari, has been frequently considered a *terminus technicus* to denote an altered state of consciousness conducive to receiving divine messages. However, our analysis has shown that *maḥûm* is one of a number of intense psycho-behavioural conditions that, like a number of other terms associated with prophets, are also attested outside prophecy.

Besides prophetic parapsychology—of which there is no certain evidence—there are clear references among the corpora, especially in the Neo-Assyrian and Hebrew sources, to the various means employed by deities to transmit their messages to the prophets.

8.5.4 Spoken Transmission.

Even as prophets transmitted oracles to their audiences verbally, apparently so did deities. Like the prophets, the deities are also reported to have “spoken” among all three corpora, though at Mari such references are limited only to deities

¹⁸ Along these lines, Grabbe (*Socio-historical Study*, 111) may still be correct to stress that we cannot deny ecstatic experiences categorically to Israelite prophets on the basis of 1 Sam 10: 5–7 and 19: 20–24, passages otherwise outside of our present consideration. Yet even here, the relationship between them is ambiguous. For it is not the נביאים, but Saul and his messengers, upon whom “the Spirit of YHWH rushed” and whose consciousness is allegedly altered.

who address other deities within the context of the divine council. Alternatively, the Neo-Assyrian and Hebrew sources both contain references to prophets who claim that a deity had actually spoken to *them*. Despite these differences, clear claims are made in all three corpora—including at Mari—that the divine speech of the deity was audible to prophets. In particular, our Hebrew sources attest numerous terms related to the aural acquisition of divine messages from the deity.

8.5.5 Visual Transmission.

Only in our Hebrew sources is the receipt of prophetic divine messages associated with visual transmission. There, prophets variously claim that they would “look to see” (צפה + ראה) what the deity would “say” (דבר) to them, that the deity had “shown” (Hif. ראה) them spoken divine messages, and that opponents would admonish the prophets against “seeing” that they might only “speak” auspicious oracles. Mesopotamian sources, on the other hand, typically associate visual transmission (*naṭālu, amāru*) with mantic “dreams” (*šuttu, tabrīt mūšu*) and the *šabru* dream diviners, rather than prophecy and prophets.

Despite the distinction, a close relationship between prophecy and oneiromancy is evident in the Mesopotamian sources. Indeed, the previous tendency in scholarship to conflate the two forms, and include numerous dream oracles as specimens of Mesopotamian prophecy,¹⁹ belie their proximity. At Mari, dreams and prophecy are contiguously reported in a letter from Addu-duri to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 237). Likewise, in the Neo-Assyrian sources, divine encouragements given to Assurbanipal through prophecy and dream reports are recalled alongside each other in both his royal inscriptions (Asb. B: v 47–76, 95) and correspondence

¹⁹ Consequently, on this basis Grabbe (*Socio-historical Study*, 108, 147–48) considers the frequent occurrence of חזה and ראה in Hebrew prophetic contexts to refer to the reception of divine messages through dreams. Despite their proximity, however, prophecy and oneiromancy represent two distinct divinatory modes. For discussion, see above, Sec. 7 n. 109; Nakata, “Two Remarks,” 143–48.

(SAA 10 174: 7–16). Interestingly, Joel 3: 1 (Eng. 2: 28) presents something akin to the Mesopotamian examples.

8.5.6 Summary.

Audible transmission of spoken divine messages is the means by which prophets communicated with their immediate audiences in all three corpora. Only the Mari and Hebrew sources, however, attest the communication of oracles through accompanying symbolic actions or in written form, with the latter demonstrating significant differences between the two corpora. Like the prophets, the deities also audibly transmit oracles by verbal means in all three corpora, whereas reference to the reception of prophetic divine messages by visual means occurs only in our Hebrew sources.

8.6 The Content of Prophetic Oracles.

8.6.1 Commissioning of Prophets.

Indications of the divine impetus for prophetic activity, usually associated with Hebrew prophecy, occur in the Mesopotamian corpora as well. In the Hebrew sources, the deity is often attested commissioning prophets directly through oracles, charging them to confront various audiences with divine messages. Alternatively, at Mari it is not the quoted speech of the deity, but the prophets themselves who claim to have been divinely “sent” (*šapārum*). Only the Neo-Assyrian sources contain a comparable oracular example. In one text an unnamed deity allegedly threatens a man with mortal consequences if he doesn’t “tell (the divine message) to somebody belonging to the entourage of the king”.²⁰

²⁰ SAA 10 199: r. 7’–8’.

8.6.2 Affirming the Rule of the King.

The Mari and Neo-Assyrian corpora closely overlap in their respective descriptions of the king's cultivation and investiture, albeit for significantly different purposes. Oracles in both sources claim that the king was reared, protected, and appointed to the throne by deities who equipped them for the kingship and established their territorial dominion. In the Neo-Assyrian sources, these claims are frequently accompanied by intimate references to the maternal care of the deity and were relayed for the king's comfort and reassurance in the midst of military conflict and national uncertainty. The Mari sources, by contrast, supplement claims about the divine origins of kingship with various cultic demands so as to remind the king that he is beholden to the deities and to intimidate him into fulfilling their demands.

Unlike the Mesopotamian corpora, references to previous divine acts of nurturing, care, and territorial mandate are broadly addressed to unspecified popular audiences in the Hebrew sources. There, oracles claim that the people of Israel were liberated from Egypt,²¹ led through the wilderness, raised,²² and given the territory of the Amorites²³ all by the benevolence of YHWH. Rhetorically, such assertions serve to convey that, like the king of Mari, the people of Israel were indebted to their deity. Yet they also function as the premise upon which the deity indicts the people of Israel for their purported cultic infidelity, as will be discussed further below.

8.6.3 Opposing Foreign Enemies.

There is broad agreement among the corpora concerning the portrayal of divine opposition against foreign enemies in oracles. Hostile lands, kings, and their

²¹ Amos 2: 9–11, 3: 1, 9: 7; Hos. 11: 1–5, 12: 13; Mic. 6: 3–5.

²² Hos. 11: 1–5; Isa. 5: 1–7.

²³ Amos 2: 9–11.

offenses are similarly identified and described in all three corpora, though the Neo-Assyrian and Hebrew deities also present what appear to be deliberately patterned series of multiple lands, suggesting a certain literary character to each.²⁴ The deities in the three corpora, moreover, all employ conventional conflict nomenclature as they promise to wage divine warfare against all opposition. And finally, the role of the addressee—usually the king, though more often the people of Israel in the Hebrew sources—is almost always expected to be passive as the deities act on their behalf. In view of these multiple points of overlap, it could be said that among the corpora there exists a remarkably comparable image of divine warfare which, along with its frequent attestation among various conquest accounts,²⁵ reflects an otherwise familiar ideology occurring throughout the ancient Near East.

8.6.4 Opposing Domestic Enemies.

In contrast to foreign enemies, the identification of and opposition to domestic enemies, which are attested only in the Neo-Assyrian and Hebrew corpora, are somewhat less comparable. In Neo-Assyrian oracles, the deities refer to internal threats much the same as they do external ones: in relation to the king. Thus, domestic enemies are those who are hostile to the king, oppose his rule, rebel against his kingship, and seek to expel him from the Assyrian throne. The Hebrew oracles, by contrast, identify those who are disloyal to the deity YHWH and the exclusivity of his divine kingship over Israel.²⁶ There, YHWH holds culpable the people of Israel and, especially, their leaders for their cultic improprieties, social injustice, and political entanglements with foreign powers.

²⁴ See the previous sections 5.6.1.2 and 7.6.1.

²⁵ Younger, *Conquest Accounts*, 249–66.

²⁶ Note the inclusion of מלך (“king”) in the titulary of YHWH among the Hebrew sources: Isa. 6: 5; 33: 17, 22; Mic. 2: 13; Zeph. 3: 15.

Against these threats, the deities of both corpora promise to respond utilizing conventional conflict nomenclature and describing miraculous acts of physical intervention. Rather uniquely, the Hebrew oracles also threaten divine chastisement and withdrawal, wherein the people of Israel will no longer have meaningful access to their national deity for he will depart from them, and, eventually, give them up into the hands of hostile foreign nations.

8.6.5 Divine Obligations.

Broadly speaking, the oracles of all three corpora present various divine demands which their respective audiences were expected to fulfill. Deities in the Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources appear to have frequently exhorted kings with similar cultic requests. In both sources, these commonly included the provision of temple supplies and offerings, the performance of sacrifices, cult statues, temple repairs, etc. At Mari, requests may even extend to various objects (inc. people and land) of divine desire, whereas in the Neo-Assyrian oracles the deities could also demand less tangible expressions of religious piety—asking the king to pray, praise, and worship. Indications in both corpora suggest that the king was obliged to reciprocate the divine support given to him—not least his investiture—by fulfilling these demands. Failing to do so, according to the Mari sources, the king could be threatened with defeat, disaster, and dethronement.

In the Hebrew sources, the demands of the deity are relatively more implicit: the audience should cease offending the deity and, in many cases, they should do the opposite of that which they have been indicted of doing. Moreover, the sufferings of the people of Israel are explained as admonishment, wherein the deity seeks that, through their limited punishment, they would eventually come to a renewed obedience.

8.6.6 Summary

Among the corpora, the contents of oracles are at once both overlapping and variegated. Whereas in each the deities commissioned the prophets and their messages, affirmed the divine origins of their addressees, promised to confront opposition, and communicated various divine demands, it seems they did so for not altogether similar reasons. Incompatibilities between the corpora may find some explanation in their different intended audiences. In Neo-Assyrian sources, the deities recount the divine origins of the kingship in order to reassure the king, whereas, at Mari, such claims act to pressure him into fulfilling divine demands, and, in our Hebrew sources, references to previous divine support lay the basis for present accusations against the people of Israel. Likewise, while oracles in the Neo-Assyrian sources are almost exclusively addressed to the king, condemning all those who oppose him, in our Hebrew sources they are frequently addressed to the people, indicting them for their opposition against their divine king YHWH.

8.7 Responses to Prophecy.

8.7.1 Reporting Prophecy.

Broadly speaking, all three corpora demonstrate expectations, incumbent upon those who heard them, that oracles must be relayed to their intended addressees. According to the Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources, audiences were explicitly obliged to report on prophetic activity out of their fealty to the king and in fulfillment of his commands. Having discharged their duty and informed the king, those who reported prophecy evidently considered their actions a mark of loyalty. Alternatively, for those suspected of failing to report prophecy, the spectre of subsequent denunciation and royal rebuke was always a clear and present threat.

The Hebrew sources, by contrast, are virtually silent with regard to any political obligation to report prophecy, but, instead, refer only to the divine

commission of prophets to deliver oracles. Amos, in particular, outlines the divine origins of his activity and the constraining duty of the Hebrew prophet when he explains: “YHWH took me from following the flock and YHWH said to me ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ Now therefore hear the word of YHWH...”²⁷ A similar divine charge is described in ARM 26 215 from Mari where, in the context of a prophetic oracle, the deity Dagan commands his immediate audience to relay his divine demands to the king—something the letter’s author Lanasûm duly does. There is also no indication that Amaziah’s denunciation of Amos to the king Jeroboam (Amos 7:10–11) was motivated by anything other than his official status at the Bethel temple and his concerns over the treacherous content of the oracles. Certainly, Amaziah harbored no doubts over the authenticity of Amos’ status as a “prophet,” though what exactly Amaziah perceived an *authentic* prophet to be remains a moot point.

8.7.2 Confirming Prophecy.

Only the Mari and Hebrew sources indicate that oracles were associated with secondary divine confirmation. At Mari, oracles were often subsequently confirmed by extispicy wherein the physical specimens of the prophet(esse)s responsible for utterances were subjected to divinatory verification by a *haruspex*. In the Hebrew sources, however, there is no evidence of such technical procedures associated with prophecy. Rather, in the presence of a prophet, audiences apparently could request signs directly from the deity to confirm the reliability of the oracles they heard. Moreover, although such signs could vary from the mundane to the miraculous, they were largely straight-forward, quite unlike extispicy, which required the skilled interpretation of an animal’s exta by specialist personnel.

²⁷ Amos 7: 15–16.

More important than the practice of divine confirmation, however, was the opinion of the king. At Mari the king himself was consulted over the content of oracles, his prerogative explicitly trumping the opinion of the *haruspex* on several occasions. In the Neo-Assyrian sources the king's verdict apparently was supreme and no alternative procedures for evaluating prophecy are attested. The situation is not as clear in the Hebrew sources, where examples of the king's compliance or non-compliance with a divine utterance could, perhaps, imply that oracles underwent at least some kind of an *informal* verification by the sovereign himself. Without any explicit description, however, it remains speculative to think that there was any formal procedure along the lines of that which is indicated in the other corpora.

8.7.3 Recompensing Prophets.

The giving of recompense to prophets for their oracular activity appears to be a somewhat variegated practice that is common to all three corpora. At Mari, prophets evidently received material payment from the royal purse commensurate with their recognized status as messengers. There are also numerous indications that such rewards could frequently be quite handsome when actually paid, while on some occasions the prophets themselves resort to demanding payment immediately upon delivering their oracles. The livelihoods of prophets in the Neo-Assyrian sources, on the other hand, seem largely to have been supported, in kind, through the temples with which they were associated. Although there is some limited evidence that exceptionally valuable material rewards could be bestowed upon prophets that were active in very public contexts. Finally, whilst there is no actual record of payment made to prophets in the Hebrew sources, a number of allusions to the material demands of prophets suggests, at least, that such payments could often be expected and were most likely paid to secure favourable oracles from

prophets. Indeed, among their complaints, the prophets whose oracles are recorded in the Hebrew sources often accuse their colleagues of selling out and delivering purportedly divine messages that are actually scripted to the desires of their paying audiences.

8.7.4 Compliance, Non-Compliance, and Prohibition.

Recording the addressee's compliance or non-compliance with the content of oracles appears to have been of greater concern in the Hebrew sources than it was in either of the Mari or Neo-Assyrian sources. In the latter, an audience's response is largely dependent upon whether or not the oracle will be eventually confirmed by either technical procedure or the decision of the king. In the meantime, those who report prophecy to the king appear content to await his reply before doing anything they have been divinely instructed to undertake. In the Hebrew sources, on the other hand, an oracle's acceptance or rejection appears to have depended largely on the basis of the oracle's content and its perceived favorability to their respective audiences. Along these lines, only prophets in the Hebrew sources are recorded to have been censured and prohibited from speaking, apparently the result of having disturbed the sensitivities of their immediate audiences.

8.7.5 Summary.

With regard to how audiences responded to prophecy, there appears to be both a significant amount of comparison as well as contrast between the corpora. Whilst reporting prophecy was clearly a priority among the corpora, they appear to differ over whether there was a political (Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources) or only a divine (Hebrew sources) obligation to do so. Similarly, whereas all three indicate that prophecy could face secondary confirmation, the Neo-Assyrian sources exclusively attest the importance of royal prerogative, while the Mari and Hebrew sources indicate that prophecy could also be divinely corroborated by subsequent

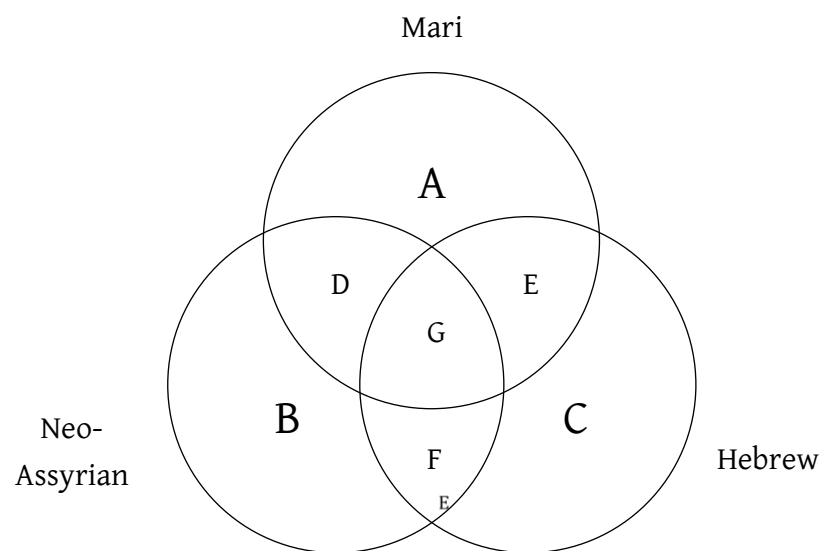
procedures and signs, respectively. Finally, prophets were evidently given rewards in all the corpora, although only the Mari and Hebrew sources attest them demanding payment while the Neo-Assyrian sources explicitly indicate that prophets were supported by their respective temples.

This completes our synthesis of observations on the phenomenon of prophecy in the three corpora and we now turn to aggregate what conclusions and implications may be drawn from this comparative exercise.

9. Conclusions and Implications.

During the course of this thesis it has become increasingly evident that there are various similarities and differences between the phenomena of prophecy in the Mari, Neo-Assyrian, and Hebrew sources. I propose that the relationships between the three phenomena may be represented by the following Venn diagram:

Figure 1: Relationships of Mari, Neo-Assyrian, and Hebrew prophetic phenomena to one another.



Where A, B, and C denote elements of each prophetic phenomena that appear to be unique to the Mari, Neo-Assyrian, and Hebrew contexts, respectively; D, E, and F, refer to elements that, while overlapping between only two corpora, are absent in the third. Finally, G represents those elements common to all three corpora.

Beginning with the latter (G), elements common to all three corpora include: the prompting of oracles through prayer; both male and female prophets and their status as messengers of the deity; the temple as a venue for prophecy as well as the activity of prophets outside temples in public or royal venues; the spoken communication of oracles aloud to their immediate audiences; the promises of divine opposition against foreign enemies and the placing of divine demands on the addressees of prophetic oracles; the obligation of audiences to transmit oracles onto their intended addressees.

To some extent, overlapping among the three corpora is not an altogether surprising result, but is to be expected by definition. However, not all similarities extend across every one of three corpora. It is of interest to note the close proximity of prophecy at Mari to that of the other two corpora despite its chronological separation by as much as a millennium, whereas the roughly contemporaneous Hebrew and Neo-Assyrian phenomena demonstrate only a little overlap outside of what has already been mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Conversely, there also occur many significant differences, and not just between the biblical and Mesopotamian corpora either, but, just as importantly, between the images of prophecy in Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources as well. Differences are due, in part, to each phenomena possessing elements unique to its own context (A, B, and C). So, only the Neo-Assyrian sources attest *raggimu* as a prophetic title, while the title *āpilum*, the prompting of prophetic oracles by conducting sacrifices, and the confirmation of prophecy through extispicy are all exclusive to the sources from Mari. Moreover, only the Hebrew sources attest oracles which threaten to censure their domestic audiences.

Differences between the corpora can also be observed where certain elements that are present among two sources are, by contrast, absent in the third (D, E, and

F). Common to the Mesopotamian sources are prophets which demonstrate identical titles (*muhhûm/mahhû*) and engage in cultic rituals, while their oracles are collected from across the fertile crescent and typically required the authorisation of the king before they were to be acted upon. Alternatively, these elements are completely absent from prophecy in our Hebrew sources. Similarly, in both the Mari and Hebrew sources mediated inquiries could prompt prophecy, prophets could communicate oracles through symbolic actions and in writing, they demanded rewards for their prophetic activity, and the content of divine utterances sometimes attempted to persuade—if not intimidate—their addressees into compliance. However, none of these elements is attested with prophecy in the Neo-Assyrian sources. Finally, whereas in the Neo-Assyrian and Hebrew sources it appears that the deities audibly spoke to the prophet their messages—some of which promised divine opposition to domestic enemies hostile to the king (human or divine)—these elements are absent from the image of prophecy at Mari.

Implications.

Three Sources for Prophecy are Better than Two.

Although differences between prophetic phenomena may seem significant where two sources are compared, such discrepancies are frequently mitigated, if not resolved, by reference to a third corpus. This point is especially relevant for recent comparative studies which form certain historical judgments on Hebrew prophecy on the basis of its apparent divergence from the Neo-Assyrian phenomenon alone.

One of these, de Jong's study of the Isaiah tradition, distinguishes the book's "earliest stages" from its "later literary reworking" largely on comparative

grounds,¹ wherein oracular material consistent with the positive and encouraging divine messages uniformly attested in Neo-Assyrian prophecy is attributed to an eighth-century prophet. Alternatively, negative and critical sayings, apparently incompatible with Neo-Assyrian prophecy, purportedly denote later interpolations. However, the significance of such contrasts and, hence, the validity of his historical distinctions are diminished by further comparison to the prophetic oracles at Mari, where divine intimidation and implicit criticisms of the king are attested alongside promises of divine support and the endorsement of his throne.

The situation of R. Mack's recent comparative study of the minor prophets Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah is somewhat similar. Mack claims that, in stark contrast to Neo-Assyrian prophecy, the three minor prophets do not address cultic fidelity or the concerns of the monarchy, instead, they address the community as a whole and promote abstract ethical expressions of piety.² He concludes: "taken together, the lack of evidence of monarchic patronage and genre transformation suggest composition in the post-monarchic era."³ Notwithstanding that in all likelihood these texts may well have been produced later than they purport, nevertheless, further comparison to prophecy at Mari mitigates the significance of Mack's claims that such content was exclusive to the Hebrew sources. Indeed, some of the earliest Mari letters identified as prophecy contain ethical exhortations, while a number of others similarly do not address the king or his affairs but public crowds, specified or otherwise.

In all, the significance of observations derived from silhouetting one corpus against another may be further strengthened, or, as illustrated above, diminished, when subjected to further comparison with a third corpus.

¹ Doing so despite his admonitions against such an approach, see de Jong, *Isaiah*, 38–170.

² Mack, "A Comparative Analysis," 383–87.

³ Mack, "A Comparative Analysis," 389.

Mesopotamian Prophecy is Composed of Two Distinct Corpora.

Despite the frequency with which observations on prophecy in the Mari and Neo-Assyrian sources are combined and then juxtaposed against the Hebrew phenomenon, this practice needs to be re-evaluated. This study has shown that in the ancient Near East there are three distinct corpora that attest prophecy, not two, so that it is no longer accurate (if it ever was) to discuss prophecy in terms of biblical versus non-biblical (or, “extra-biblical”) sources. Similarities between prophecy in the two Mesopotamian corpora are undisputed and have typically been the focus and purpose of their comparison.⁴ Nevertheless, Mari and Neo-Assyrian prophecy are not identical, but do clearly diverge at a number of important points. As has been mentioned already, both possess completely unique elements unattested elsewhere. Moreover, they each overlap with the Hebrew corpus in ways different to each other as well. To this extent, the variations between the Mesopotamian corpora may reflect significant diachronic changes, a view which may have implications for the study of Hebrew prophecy and is worthy of future investigation. At any rate, discrepancies between Hebrew prophecy and one or the other of the Mesopotamian phenomena may be mitigated by the fact that clear contrasts also exist between Mari and Neo-Assyrian prophecy.

⁴ M. Dietrich, “Prophetie in den Keilschrifttexten,” *JARG* 1 (1973) 15–44; K. van der Toorn, “L’oracle de victoire comme expression prophétique au Proche-Orient,” *RB* 94 (1987) 63–97; Huffmon, “Prophecy,” 5: 477–82; Nissinen, “Socioreligious Role,” 89–114.

Postscript

*A Brief Note on J. Stökl, Prophecy in the Ancient Near East:
A Philological and Sociological Comparison. Leiden: Brill, 2012.*

As Stökl himself explains, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* represents an edited version of his doctoral thesis, which he had originally completed at Oxford University in 2008, about the time my own research interests were coming into focus.

Admittedly, even a cursory glance at the title amply indicates that between our studies there is bound to exist a degree of overlap. This, of course, should come as no great surprise. The renewed interest in Mesopotamian (especially Neo-Assyrian) prophecy since the mid-1990s, along with the glaring absence of any comprehensive comparative study which addressed the three major corpora together, made the appearance of our studies inevitable, albeit incidental that they should arrive almost in unison.

Indeed, there is overlap between Stökl's work and the present study. On an general level, we are both concerned with accurately describing the "sociological" or "phenomenological" character of prophecy in the ancient Near East. We overlap with regard to our preference for a comparative methodology. Moreover, our selection of sources for representing prophecy, particularly among the Mesopotamian materials, also overlaps, despite some notable exceptions.

Nevertheless, significant differences between the two studies do exist. Stökl's overriding concern is to delineate clearly what he argues are the distinct social-roles of the various personnel associated with prophecy. For Stökl, there are "professional" prophets and coincidental ones. The former prophesy by dint of their

position as court officials, who are responsible to the king and were not bound to a particular temple, nor participated in cultic rituals. As for the latter, they were “ecstatics” whose social-roles were tied to the temple, where they primarily served as temple officials and would only prophesy incidentally, whilst they performed their primary duty of implementing cult rituals.

Of course, the present study addresses these prophetic titles as well, albeit concluding that there is insufficient evidence to support the extent to which Stökl seeks to drive a wedge between them. In contrast to Stökl’s focus upon prophetic personnel, the present study seeks to understand the prophetic phenomenon more broadly and compare the various corpora along seven lines: Prompting Prophecy, Prophetic Personnel, Prophetic Deities, Venues, Means of Delivery, Content of Oracles, and the Responses to Prophecy.

To this extent, there is a conscious effort in this study to maintain that the Mesopotamian corpora represent two distinct phenomena, separated by almost a millennium, despite their geographical proximity. Accordingly, the extent to which prophecy compares and contrasts between these corpora is as much under investigation as how they individually relate to the image of prophecy in the Hebrew sources. From time to time, Stökl’s work touches upon this issue, but, certainly, not to the same degree as may be found in the present study.

In any case, it is rather unfortunate that Stökl’s valuable work came to my attention only after the chapters pertaining to Mesopotamian prophecy were largely complete. Sifting through Assyriological analysis of Mesopotamian prophecy was often a lonely task and Stökl’s analysis could potentially have been a fruitful dialogue partner had it appeared just a year or two earlier.

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